OCR CLASSICAL CIVILISATION

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AS & A LEVEL COMPONENT 11

THE WORLD OF THE HERO

Sally Knights

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AS AND A LEVEL

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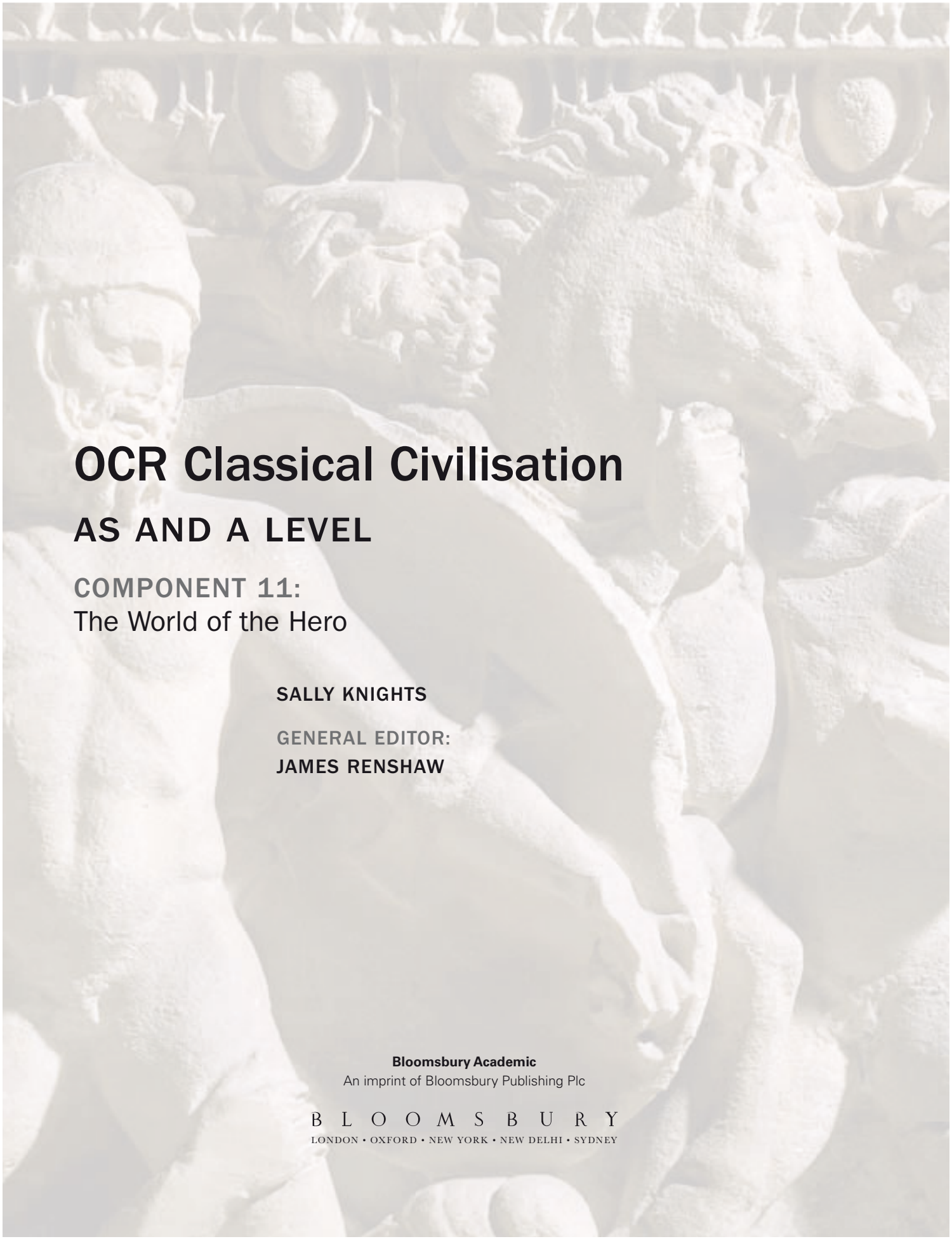

OCR Classical Civilisation

AS AND A LEVEL

COMPONENT 11:
The World of the Hero

SALLY KNIGHTS

GENERAL EDITOR:
JAMES RENSHAW

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INTRODUCTION

This book has been created to support the new OCR A Level specification in Classical Civilisation Component 11: The World of the Hero. It aims to help students gain a sophisticated level of knowledge and understanding of the content of the epics, and of the society in which they were created. While providing a sound basis of knowledge, it helps to develop the skills of critical analysis and evaluation, and to produce coherent and well-supported arguments.

The topic headings in the book have the same wording, and are in the same order, as in the specification. The terminology used for ancient concepts follows that used in the specification.

This book is not a substitute for reading the texts, and you will need a good grasp of the characters and plot in order to appreciate the topics discussed here. There are support materials on the Companion Website (www.bloomsbury.com/class-civ-as-a-level) and published commentaries are available.

The topics cannot be viewed in isolation. For example, literary techniques are used to convey themes or characters, and characters are needed in the discussion of the social context. This book can be used both for general guidance before you read the texts, and to support in-depth study when preparing essays. The many sub-headings and topic summaries at the beginning of each section will help you work through the subject matter.

Much of the emphasis is on student involvement in the study of the epics, and on the importance of realising that there are many interpretations of the texts. Understanding why they have been studied for over 2,000 years, and are still a matter of lively debate among scholars, is as important as finding 'the right answers' to the meanings of episodes or portrayals of characters.

The discussion of literary composition for both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is in one section, since the same material applies to both epics. Thereafter the three epics are discussed in separate chapters.

The presentation of the topics varies:

- Sometimes a chart is used as the most appropriate way to convey information or organise ideas.
- In some topics the student is given a starting point, such as a list of criteria, and is asked to find examples, or to flesh out an essay plan.
- Sometimes the material for the topic may have already been touched upon under another heading. In that case, the section on the topic might take the form of leading questions, encouraging the student to use the resources available to formulate ideas.

A Companion Website, available at www.bloomsbury.com/class-civ-as-a-level, supports this textbook with further information, resources and updates. If you have any suggestions for improvement and additional resources, please get in touch by writing to contact@bloomsbury.com.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book can be used by AS or A Level students. At AS Level, you choose one of the epics of Homer, either the *Odyssey* or *Iliad*. You do not study Virgil's *Aeneid*. At A Level you pick one from the Homeric epics, and also study Virgil's *Aeneid*. The courses are identical except for the following:

SECONDARY READING

A Level candidates are required to make use of relevant secondary reading in order to further their analysis and argument, and reference to it is assessed in the 30-mark essay question. Although AS candidates will not be assessed on specific references, a 'critical perceptive analysis' is required. This comes from reading the same sorts of academic works as those studying for the A Level are required to be familiar with.

ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

The A Level assessment is slightly more weighted towards AO2 (analysis and evaluation) than the AS Level. This difference is not significant for the study of the texts or routine questions and essays, and can be addressed at the stage when examination practice is being undertaken.

The examination overviews below give more detail.

EXAM OVERVIEW: AS LEVEL

Your assessment for the World of the Hero will be

50% of the AS Level 1 hr 30 mins 65 marks

32 marks will test AO1: demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- literature and either visual/material culture or classical thought
- how sources and ideas reflect, and influence, their cultural contexts
- possible interpretations of sources, perspectives and ideas by different audiences and individuals.

33 marks will test AO2: critically analyse, interpret and evaluate literature and visual/material culture or classical thought, using evidence to make substantiated judgements and produce coherent and reasoned arguments.

EXAM OVERVIEW: A LEVEL

Your assessment for the World of the Hero will be

40% of the A Level 2 hr 20 mins 100 marks

45 marks will test AO1: demonstrate knowledge and understanding of:

- literature, visual/material culture and classical thought
- how sources and ideas reflect, and influence, their cultural contexts
- possible interpretations of sources, perspectives and ideas by different audiences and individuals.

55 marks will test AO2: critically analyse, interpret and evaluate literature, visual/material culture, and classical thought, using evidence to make substantiated judgements and produce coherent and reasoned arguments.

The layout design and box features of this book are designed to aid learning.

COLOUR

Box features that focus on assessment preparation and exam skills are coloured in blue.

Box features with Stretch and Challenge material are coloured in yellow.

All other box features are coloured in red.

ICONS

The Prescribed Source icon PS flags a quotation or image that is a source prescribed in the specification.

The Stretch and Challenge icon S&C indicates that an exercise extends beyond the core content of the specification.

The Companion Website icon CW highlights where extra material can be found on the Bloomsbury Companion Website: www.bloomsbury.com/class-civ-as-a-level.

BOX FEATURES

In the margins you will find feature boxes giving short factfiles of key events, individuals and places.

Other features either **recommend** teaching material or highlight **prescribed** content and **assessment** tips and information.

Recommended teaching material is found in the following box features:

- Activities
- Classical Legacy
- Debates
- Explore Further
- Further Reading
- Study Questions
- Topic Reviews

Prescribed content and assessment-focused tips and information are found in the following box features:

- Exam Overviews
- Exam Tips
- Modern Scholarship
- Practice Questions

Material that extends beyond the specification is found in the Stretch and Challenge box features. Remember that the specification requires students to study extra sources and material not listed in the specification, so S&C information and exercises will provide a good place for you to start.

A NOTE ON QUESTIONS

Questions found in Topic Review boxes and Study Question boxes are not worded in the form you will find on the exam papers. They are intended to encourage investigation and revision of the material, but do not reflect the questions in the exam. Practice Questions at the end of each topic, and the questions found in the 'What to Expect in the Exam' chapters do mirror the format and wording you will encounter in the exam.

GLOSSARY

At the back of the book you will find a full glossary of key words. These words are also defined on pages in margin features.

Spellings of names and texts are formatted in line with the OCR specification.

On the Companion Website you will find a colour-coded glossary that highlights which components the words come from.

IMAGES

The images in this book have several purposes. There are photographs of museum artefacts which reflect the context of the epics, and ancient illustrations of the stories which will help you to visualise the characters and events in the poems. Other images, which span the last two thousand years, and range from grand master paintings to a figure from a New York funfair, give insights into how the ancient heroes have been received over the centuries. Looking at these images will help you to appreciate a wide range of perspectives on the world of the hero, and to develop your own interpretations and responses.

COMPANION WEBSITE

Resources will include:

- annotated further reading
- links to websites that give useful contextual material for study
- quizzes on key topics and themes
- worksheets to supplement Activity box features in the book

DON'T FORGET

Look out for cross references to other pages in the book – this is where you will find further information and be able to link concepts or themes.

A NOTE ON THE THREE EPICS

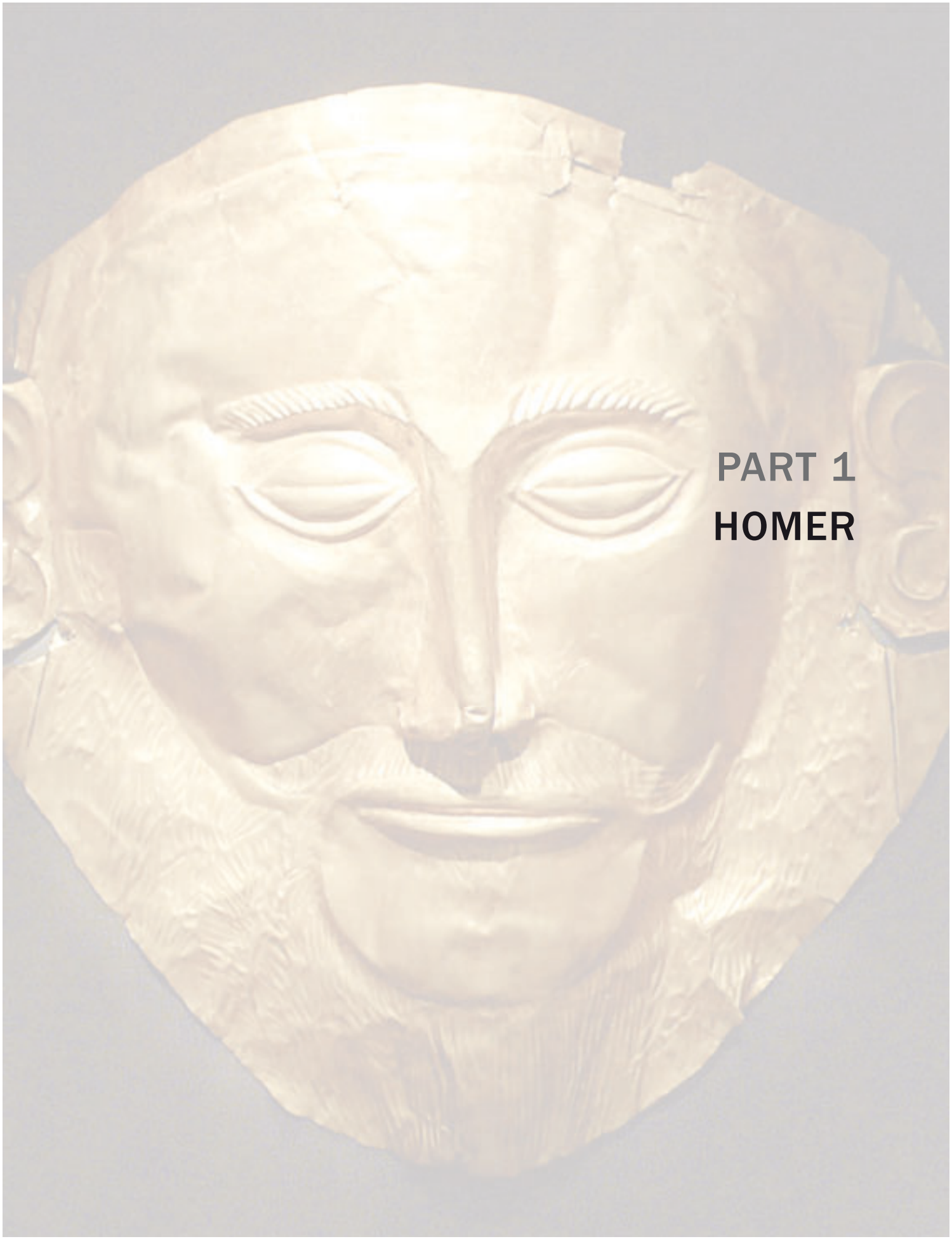
All three epics are related to the Trojan War. The *Iliad* tells of the consequences of one warrior's outrage in the final year of the war, the *Odyssey* of one Greek's return from Troy to reclaim his home, and the *Aeneid* of one Trojan exile's quest to establish a new home in Italy. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were in Greek; the *Aeneid* was in Latin.

Homer's epics were composed orally to be recited by bards in a distant time about which we know little. With their exciting stories, distinctive characters of gods and men, and timeless moral principles, they became a crucial part of later Greek culture. Virgil's *Aeneid* is based on Homer's epics. However, it was written during the newly-formed regime of the first Roman emperor, and has a very definite historical and political context.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Katherine Callen King, *Ancient Epic*, Wiley-Blackwell 2012, chapters 3, 4 and 7 give a great introduction to Classical epic.

FIGURE 1
In the nineteenth century, the *Odyssey* was very popular, and publishers produced translations richly illustrated with engravings of Odysseus' adventures.



PART 1
HOMER

Composition of the Epics

TOPIC OVERVIEW

Composition

- literary context in which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were created and handed down, including:
  - oral tradition and context
  - transmission of the text
  - whether they were the work of one or more poets

This section is common to both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey.* It discusses the Mycenaean context and explores many of the questions that are still being asked about the composition of the epics, such as:

- who composed them
- when they might have been written down
- how they were recited or performed.

LITERARY CONTEXT

An analysis of language in the epics tells us that the poems were composed by a Greek who lived in Ionia (the west coast of modern Turkey), probably in about 725–700 BC. Tradition calls this composer Homer, though nothing is known about him. Scholars still argue as to whether the same person was responsible for both epics, or indeed whether there was one composer or many. Several places claim to be the birthplace of Homer, and because Demodocus, the bard in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, is blind, there is a tradition that Homer was blind. Blindness is often associated with divine inspiration: what the bard sings, he must have received from the gods.

dactylic hexameter – the metre in which the Homeric poems are composed

The epics are composed in **dactylic hexameters**. Each line of a hexameter has six feet. Each foot can be made up of one long and two short vowel sounds, or two long vowel sounds. This allows the poet to vary the pace.

EXPLORE FURTHER

These two excellent introductions are good places to start your wider reading:
Barbara Graziosi, *Homer* (OUP, 2016), *Part 1 The Poet*, pp. 7–56
Ahuvia Kahane, *Homer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury, 2012), Chapters 1–5

For an overview of the ancient world in the Homeric period, see:
Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making 1200–479 BC* (Routledge, 2009) Chapter 5, 'The World of Hesiod and of Homer'.

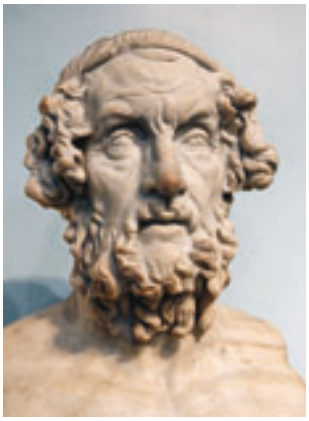


FIGURE 2
This Roman copy of a lost Greek bust of Homer reminds us of the popularity of Homer throughout the ancient world.

CONTEXT

The poems are set during the Trojan War. Excavations at Hisarlik, thought to be the site of Troy, show that the city was indeed destroyed by fire in about 1200 BC. However, this cannot be taken as evidence that the war as described by Homer took place.

Until about the same date, a culture flourished which was based on rich palace centres. The best known of these centres is Mycenae, which in the Homeric poems is the home of Agamemnon. This time is known as the Mycenaean period. The excavations of the archaeologist Schliemann in the late nineteenth century have given much evidence of the wealth of the Mycenaeans, though much controversy surrounds Schliemann's finds.

The composer of the Homeric epics will not have seen the evidence that we know from museums, but must have been aware through stories, of a distant past when there were rich palaces, ornate bronze weapons and golden treasures.

The setting of the epics broadly in the **Bronze Age Mycenaean period** is not in doubt, but still debated is the date when the poems we know as Homer's came into being. There is the added complication that not all scholars would say that the poems did 'come into being' at a particular date, arguing that they were developed over time by different poets.

There is no definitive evidence in the texts which allows a date of composition to be established.

Although the setting is the Bronze Age, there are references to materials and practices which belong to Homer's own times: iron is mentioned as well as bronze, bodies are cremated, not buried, and warriors carry two spears, not one. For example, iron axes are a prize in the funeral games (*Iliad* 23, 851) and used in the bow challenge (*Odyssey* 19); cooling iron is used in a simile (*Odyssey* 9, 393) and Mentes (Athene in disguise) is carrying iron cargo (*Odyssey* 1, 184); iron is used as a metaphor (*Iliad* 4, 510, *Iliad* 22, 357, *Odyssey* 5, 191).

Bronze Age – the period from about 3000 BC when bronze was introduced and came to be used widely.

Mycenaean period – the last phase of the Bronze Age, from about 1600–1100, centred on palace societies such as that in Mycenae

EXPLORE FURTHER

CW

For more information on Mycenaean culture, see:
John Chadwick, *The Mycenaean World* (CUP, 1976)
K A and Diana Wardle *The Mycenaean World* (Bloomsbury, 2013)
Mycenaean collections online at the British Museum and the Greek National Archaeological Museum

FIGURE 3
A gold cup from Grave Circle A in Mycenae. Did Circe in Book 10 of the *Odyssey* serve her honeyed wine in a cup like this? Would a cup like this have been found in Achilles' tent?

S & C For an explanation suitable for the non-Greek reader of the challenge of fitting words into the dactylic hexameter, see Peter Jones, *Homer's Iliad, A Commentary on Three Translations* (BCP, 2003), pp. 16–18.

EXPLORE FURTHER
A recent discussion of the world in which the poems were composed can be found in Robin Osborne, *Homer's Society* in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (CUP, 2004).

Phoenician traders are mentioned in both epics, and this is thought by some to reflect the increased movement of Phoenician traders in the eighth century. Trying to work out a date for Homer thus involves a forensic examination of evidence. As archaeology and fresh readings of texts develop, so do the theories about dates.

It is generally agreed that the *Iliad* was composed before the *Odyssey*.

ORAL TRADITION

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, however they were composed, are the result of hundreds of years of tales being transmitted by bards. We can assume that Homer expected those who listened to his epics to be familiar already with the Trojan War stories, since he plunges into the middle of the stories in his epics, and feels no need to fill in details of past events.

THE WORK OF ONE OR MANY POETS?

Oral poetry leaves no permanent record of its creation, so it is not surprising that there is more than one explanation as to how the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were composed. It seems that in ancient times critics believed that Homer wrote the poems down. In modern times, the debate was begun by the German scholar Friedrich Wolf in 1795. He argued that writing was unknown to Homer and that, since it would not have been possible for one poet to compose works as long as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* without the help of writing, no one poet could have composed them. He proposed that the epics had originally been unconnected poems and were not written down until long after Homer. The problem of knowing whether the poems were composed by one person or many is known as the **Homeric Question**.

Homeric Question – the longstanding debate surrounding Homer, essentially: did he exist? Did the same person compose the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*? Were the epics composed by one person or by many individuals?

Many scholars once believed that there were multiple authors. They based their argument on all the inconsistencies of plot and multiple repetitions that can be found in the poems.

Others claimed that the skilful design and structure of the poems and the high quality of the literary style could not come from a random collection of stories, but must be the product of one mind.

In the 1930s, the scholar Milman Parry explained the many repetitions as aids to oral composition. He drew comparisons with modern performance of oral poetry in the form of South Slavic compositions. These showed that bards were able to compose and improvise because they used pre-existing phrases which fitted the metre. He explained that **epithets**, recurring stock phrases, or **formulae**, and repeated scenes were not random repetitions, but part of the architecture of composition. Most scholars today would agree at least that the poems were not composed by multiple authors.

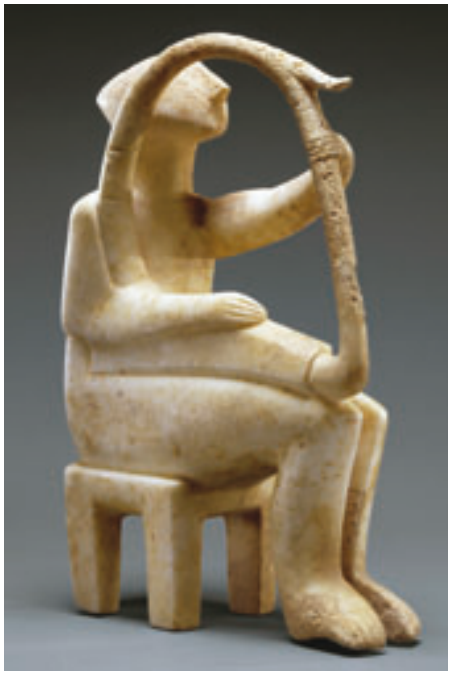


FIGURE 4
A bard, as described in the *Odyssey*, would recite stories at banquets and on public occasions. This marble figure, thought to have been made in the period 2700–2300, shows that bards were established well before Homer's time.

epithet – a word or phrase added to a name or object to denote its nature or qualities, e.g. 'thoughtful Penelope'

formulae – phrases that slot into the narrative; familiar markers of time and rituals

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'The improvisational medium of Rap Music, along with the Hip-Hop culture to which it is allied, has parallels with Greek oral epic. They both depend on a distinct rhythm and dialect featuring conventional formulaic phrases.'

Edith Hall, *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey* (I. B. Tauris, 2012)

TRANSMISSION OF THE TEXT

It is now understood that writing was developing at the time of Homer, and so the possibility that he dictated his works is now a consideration.

There is evidence that the text was standardised in the sixth century for recitation at Greek festivals.

A **rhapsode**, such as the one shown in Fig. 5 on an amphora, recited extracts from Homer at public festivals. The popularity of scenes from Homer on pottery, and the use of Homeric stories in Greek theatre indicate that Homer's works were an integral part of the culture of fifth-century Athens.

By the third century, many texts had been collected for the library at Alexandria, and the texts of the Homeric epics were standardised, with each poem being divided up into the twenty-four books we know today.

rhapsode – reciter of standard texts who performed at public festivals

FIGURE 5
Red-figured neck-amphora (storage-jar) with a rhapsode reciting the beginning of a poem, perhaps in a competition or festival.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Mary Renault's *The Praise Singer* (Arrow, 2004) is a historical novel based on the real-life poet Simonides from the fifth century BC. It conveys well the importance of poets and bards to ancient society.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'Between 800 and 750 BC, Greek culture changed forever. Some resourceful speakers of Greek, probably traders, borrowed the signs used by the ingenious Phoenicians to represent consonantal sounds, adopted some other signs to indicate vowels, and used them to write down in Greek their already canonical authors.'

Edith Hall, *The Ancient Greeks: Ten Ways They Shaped the Modern World* (Vintage, 2015)

EXPLORE FURTHER

Susan Woodford, in *The Trojan War in Ancient Art* (Bloomsbury Academic, 1993), shows the popularity of the images of the war in the ancient world.

Further Reading

Katherine Callen King, *Ancient Epic* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012)
W. A. Camps, *An Introduction to Homer* (OUP, 1980)
Robert Fowler (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Homer* (CUP, 2004)
Jasper Griffin, *Homer* (Ancients in Action) (Bloomsbury, 2013)
Richard Jenkyns, *Classical Epic Homer and Virgil* (Bristol Classical Press, 1992)
Robin Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes, Greeks and their Myths in the Epic Age of Homer* (Penguin, 2008)

The *Iliad*

1.1 Literary Techniques and Composition

TOPIC OVERVIEW

- structure and plot of the epic
- language of the epic including the use of speeches, formulae, similes and other narrative and descriptive techniques and their effects

The following prescribed sources are covered in this topic:

- Homer, *Iliad*, Books 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24

Remember that you will be given credit in the exam if you study extra sources and make relevant use of them in your answers.

This topic looks at the structure of the epic, and how techniques such as epithets, formulae, parallel scenes and similes are used to make the poetry more engaging.

STRUCTURE AND PLOT

Composition: the bard

oral poem – a poem composed without writing, performed from memory, and listened to by an audience, not read

Although there are disagreements as to the date at which the *Iliad* text became fixed, it is agreed that the poem began as an **oral poem**. There is no conclusive evidence of how this happened. Clearly a poem that would have taken the best part of twenty-four hours to recite would only have been performed in special circumstances. If it had been recited in its entirety at a public festival over three days, is it likely that people would have returned on consecutive days just to listen, when there would have been other distractions? How many bards would have known Homer's text well enough to perform it in a recognisable form? Was the *Iliad* perhaps performed in the circumstances that we know about from Homer's *Odyssey*?

In the *Odyssey*, we meet Phemius at the beginning, when he is singing to the assembled Suitors about the Trojan War. Odysseus' wife is upset by the story and asks him to sing something different. Her son Telemachus objects to this and says, 'It is always the latest song that an audience applauds most' (Book 1, 351). This suggests that there was an awareness of new compositions, and that the poems themselves were a topic of conversation. Demodocus, the other bard, performs a similar role. He recites after dinner, which

appears to have been an integral part of a banquet. Odysseus comments, 'There is nothing more delightful than when the festive mood reigns in the hearts of all the people and the banqueters listen to a minstrel from their seats in the hall . . . This, to my way of thinking is perfection' (Book 9, 5–10).

In the Greek world in 700 BC, most people would not have travelled far from their birth-place. The only public source of information from outside the community would have been the stories told by a visitor or returning traveller. If we remember this, we can see the link between an individual's fame and the songs of the bard.

Achilles has a lyre in his tent. When the Greeks arrive to talk to him in Book 9, he is enjoying playing one that he has acquired as booty during the war. Helen, too, gives us an insight as she remarks, 'Zeus surely has an evil end in store for us, intending us to figure in the songs of people yet unborn' (*Iliad*, Book 6, 358).

The Plot

Book 1 Apollo is angry because Agamemnon has insulted Chryses, his priest, and will not return his daughter, Chryseis, even for a ransom. Apollo has sent a plague. Achilles calls a council, and Agamemnon agrees to give up Chryseis if he can have Achilles' prize, a girl called Briseis. Achilles is furious and withdraws from the fighting. He asks his mother, the nymph Thetis, to grant the Trojans success so that the Greeks will realise his value. She asks Zeus, who agrees.

Book 2 Zeus sends a false dream of encouragement to Agamemnon, who is ready to fight, but first tests his troops. They are keen to return home. Odysseus persuades them that they should stay and fight. There follows a catalogue listing the troops.

Book 3 The armies are advancing. Paris offers to fight in single combat, and Menelaus takes up the challenge. King Priam and the Trojan council watch from the ramparts. Priam asks Helen about the Greek warriors. The duel begins; Paris is losing and so Aphrodite removes him and takes him back to Helen.

EXAM TIP

Learners may use any translation of the text. For the commentary passage on the examination paper, two versions will be given:

Homer's Iliad translated by Rieu, ed. Jones (Penguin, 2003).

Homer: The Iliad – The Killing Fields of Troy, translated by A.S. Kline (www.poetryintranslation.com)

The spellings are not consistent across translations: for example, Achilleus and Achilles, Patroclus and Patroklos. The revised Rieu translation, and this book, refers to Greeks rather than Achaeans or Achaians.

Book 4 Zeus thinks it is time to stop the war, as Menelaus has won the single combat. The other immortals disagree. Hera wants to see Troy destroyed. Athene arranges for the Trojan Pandarus to break the truce.

Book 5 The Greek Diomedes fights and kills many Trojans, including Pandarus. He fights with Aeneas, but is prevented from killing him by Aphrodite. Diomedes angrily attacks Aphrodite, and Apollo rescues Aeneas. The god Ares joins the battle, and Diomedes wounds him.

Book 6 Hector returns to Troy to ask Queen Hecabe to send offerings to Athene. Agamemnon makes Menelaus kill his prisoner, Adrestus. Diomedes and Glaucus are about to fight when they discover they are linked by a bond of friendship between their grandfathers. Hector meets with Andromache, his wife. She tries to persuade him to stay near the walls and not go out and fight on the battlefield.

Book 7 Hector and Paris return to the battlefield. Hector challenges any one of the Greeks to a duel. Ajax is chosen as his opponent, but the fight is ended early. A truce for the burial of the dead is arranged.

Book 8 Zeus gives encouragement to the Trojans. After a day's fighting, the Greeks withdraw behind their fortifications.

Book 9 The Greeks are demoralised by the Trojan victories. They realise that they need Achilles to fight. Ajax, Odysseus, and Achilles' old tutor Phoenix visit Achilles in his hut. They offer him gifts, but he refuses to return to the fighting.

Book 10 During the night, Diomedes and Odysseus go to spy on the Trojan positions. They capture Dolon, an enemy scout, and use information they extract from him to kill the Thracian Rhesus and some of his men, and to steal his horses.

Book 11 The fighting resumes. The Trojans push the Greeks back to their camp. Achilles, watching the retreat from his ship, sends Patroclus to find out about one of the casualties. Nestor gives Patroclus the news, and asks him to persuade Achilles to join the fighting.

Book 12 Before Patroclus can return, the Trojans attack the Greek camp.

Book 13 The two armies fight. Poseidon encourages the Greeks.

Book 14 Hera seduces Zeus in a plan to distract his attention from the war. Poseidon urges on the Greeks, and the Trojans are driven back.

Book 15 With Hector at their head, the Trojans drive back the Greeks, and try to set fire to their ships.

Book 16 Patroclus returns to Achilles, who allows him to borrow his armour and lead out his men, but warns him against pursuing the Trojans too far. Patroclus kills Sarpedon. Patroclus is wounded by the Trojan Euphorbus, and is then killed by Hector.

Book 17 Menelaus tries to protect Patroclus' body, but Hector strips it of armour. After much fighting, the Greeks finally take the naked body back to their camp.

Book 18 Achilles hears of Patroclus' death and is devastated. Thetis asks Hephaestus to make new armour for her son, and Hephaestus agrees.

Book 19 Achilles agrees to a formal reconciliation with Agamemnon, and accepts his gifts. Odysseus says that the men need to eat before they fight. As they prepare for battle, Achilles' horse tells him that he will die when he has avenged Patroclus.

Book 20 There is a council of the gods, and they take sides in the war. Achilles joins the battle, and fights Aeneas.

Book 21 Achilles pushes the Trojans back, killing many. The River Xanthus, upset at all the bodies in the river, sweeps Achilles away. He is saved by Hephaestus. The gods engage in battle.

Book 22 Achilles kills Hector and takes the corpse back to his camp after dragging it around the city behind his chariot.

Book 23 The ghost of Patroclus asks to be buried. Achilles holds funeral games.

Book 24 Achilles drags Hector's body round Patroclus' tomb. Apollo complains to Zeus, who instructs Thetis to tell her son that he should return the body. Achilles agrees to the request. After an omen from Zeus, Priam sets out for the Greek camp, accompanied by Hermes. Priam begs Achilles to release his son's body, and Achilles agrees. Priam takes the body back to Troy, and a funeral is held for Hector.

EXPLORE FURTHER

To help you appreciate the text in detail as you read, have to hand the following:
Peter Jones, *Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on Three Translations* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2003).
The commentaries in M. W. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (John Hopkins University Press, 1987).
The introduction to the *Iliad* translated by Hammond (Penguin, 1987) has a good critical summary of the plot.

EXAM TIP

If an examination question asks you about the importance of a book, do not simply tell the story of that book. Analyse how it relates to the whole epic.

It is important on your second reading not just to remember the plot, but to think about why a book or episode is important to the whole poem.

A book or episode could be important to:

- the plot, and to the pattern of the poem as a whole
- the presentation of the characters
- the themes
- the creation of emotions in the audience such as pity, fear or suspense
- poetic expression.

How important is Book 23?

Plot

- Book 22 was about the very dramatic and violent death of Hector. A lull is needed between this climactic killing and Priam's equally dramatic visit to Achilles' hut. The funeral games provide relaxation, and even touches of humour.
- Achilles' appearance in the public setting of the games in Book 23 contrasts with his distress on the seashore at the beginning of Book 23 and his meeting with Priam in Book 24.
- The games are a reminder of the first part of the *Iliad*, where the major heroes were competing to win. This time, however, it is for sport, not war. The story would make sense without the games, but they are important to the way the events unfold.

Characters

In Book 23, Achilles develops in the following ways:

- At the beginning of this book, Achilles sees Patroclus' ghost (or he dreams that), and realises that he should hold a funeral for Patroclus. He thus becomes reconciled to his friend's death (though his grief and his anger towards Hector remain).
- In acknowledging the need to carry out the funeral rites for his friend, Achilles reconciles himself to his own death. He marks the spot for a great grave-mound for Patroclus – and himself (126). Knowing that he will never return home and dedicate a lock of hair to the River Spercheus as he had promised, he cuts off the lock of hair 'so now, since I shall never see the dear land of my fathers again, I will give this lock to the warrior Patroclus to take with him instead' (140–151).
- In the contest, he has a balanced approach to dealing with the competitors' arguments, a contrast with his earlier approach. Finally he is even reconciled with Agamemnon: 'We know by how much you excel the rest of us, and that in throwing the spear no one can compete with your prowess' (890–893).
- This change of Achilles' focus during the latter part of Book 23 and his return to social values, make his decision to return the body in Book 24 possible

and credible (unless, of course, one puts his behaviour down to divine intervention).
- He shows concern for fairness: he won't use his own horses in the chariot race because they are immortal, and that would give him an unfair advantage. Ironically, he is the one who tells Ajax and Idomenus to stop quarrelling; he is sympathetic towards the young Antilochus – the warrior who had been sent to inform him of the death of Patroclus.
- However, he slaughters twelve Trojan young men on the funeral pyre, a strong indication that, despite his acceptance of the death, he is still so full of rage that he is driven to inhuman behaviour.

The games provide a last opportunity to observe the heroes – rather like a curtain-call. This reinforces their characters:

- **Agamemnon** plays little part in the contests, but is offered a prize by Achilles for his excellence.
- **Menelaus** is fouled by Antilochus in the chariot race. Menelaus suffers in the same way as Achilles had suffered in Book 1: 'You have humiliated me and everything I stand for,' he complains to Antilochus, lamenting his loss of ***timē***. But while the humiliated heroes in Book 1 had been consumed with rage, Menelaus accepts an apology. Perhaps Homer is indicating his approval when he addresses the hero directly at this point: 'So, Menelaus, was your heart warmed' (600).
- **Odysseus** holds his own against the huge Ajax son of Telamon in a wrestling match by kicking him behind the knees and tripping him up. The two heroes both excel, one in strength, one in intelligence, so Achilles wisely calls a draw.
- **Nestor** gives his advice in another over-long speech. Out of respect for his age, Achilles gives him a prize (620).
- **Antilochus** is the son of Nestor. He uses his youth as an excuse for his behaviour in the chariot race. 'I am much younger than you lord Menelaus, and you, my elder and better, know well enough how a young man can go too far. He thinks faster, but his judgement is not so sound' (590). A lesson for Achilles, perhaps?

timē – the valuing of a hero's achievement by public praise and honour. This is essential for his sense of self-worth

Themes

The following major themes are explored in Book 23:

- reconciliation
- anger
- mortality
- the nature of a hero
- *timē*
- intervention of gods
- the importance of eating
- age and youth

ACTIVITY

Listen to a sports commentary on the radio.

Then, in the same style, record your own commentary of the chariot race in Book 23, lines 287–538.

Follow it with a post-race interview and analysis with Achilles and the competitors.

The time-frame of the narrative

The *Iliad* assumes that the audience knows the story of the Trojan War. Their knowledge would have been acquired over hundreds of years of story-telling by bards, with different tales and characters being developed and elaborated as the tales were transmitted. The time-frame of the *Iliad* is interesting in three respects:

1. It embraces the story of the ten-year Trojan War, but all the events narrated take place in a timescale of about fifty days.
2. Those days are not equally distributed throughout the 24 books: Book 1 covers a period of twenty-three days; Books 2–23 cover four days; and the end of Book 23 and Book 24 cover twenty-five days.
3. Within those time divisions, some long periods are dismissed in the matter of a line, while others are related in fine detail.

The effect of this time-frame is a dynamic narrative where we zoom in and out of the action. Information about the past is revealed throughout the epic. For example:

- Helen's abduction is revealed in Book 3 as Paris reminds her of it.
- In Book 9, Phoenix tells us about Achilles as a baby.
- Patroclus' ghost recalls in Book 23 the background to the relationship between Patroclus and Achilles.
- In Book 24, Achilles tells Priam the story of his parents' marriage.

We are constantly reminded of the future.

- In Book 6, Hector talks to Andromache of the day when Priam and his people will be destroyed, and she will be taken to Argos as a slave.
- Hector is Troy's protector, and his death in Book 22 signals the city's forthcoming destruction.
- In Book 24, Andromache foresees the death of Astyanax, and Thetis that of Achilles.
- Achilles prepares Patroclus' body for the funeral pyre as though he is preparing his own funeral.
- Priam is led into the Greek camp by Hermes, the god who leads the dead to the Underworld.

S & C

The microscopic examination of a very specific period in a story might seem to be a modern trait. James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and more recently Ian McEwan's *Saturday* focus on very short periods which form part of a wider context of events.

Look at novels or films or television programmes in terms of how the writer uses time, and in what order events are revealed to the reader or audience.

S & C

We are not able to trace easily the variations in stories pre-700, but we can study the Trojan story as it is told in later years. Look at how vase-painters of ancient Athens represent scenes from the *Iliad,* and try to explain why certain scenes are popular.

Susan Woodford in *The Trojan War in Ancient Art* (Duckworth, 1993) provides many excellent examples.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read Chapter 1, 'Homer and Early Greek Epic', in William Allan's *Homer: The Iliad* (Bloomsbury, 2012) for an overview of the *Iliad* within the wider tradition of Greek epic.

The Homeric Question, as we have seen (p. 4), debates whether the epics were composed by one person or are a patchwork of stories put together over the years.

Those who favoured the theory of multiple authors looked for inconsistencies to support their case, and pointed to certain examples in the *Iliad*:

- Apollo and Athene are in the action of Book 1 (he sends a plague; she prevents Achilles from attacking Agamemnon), but Thetis says that the gods are feasting in Ethiopia for twelve days.
- Priam asks Helen the identity of the Greek leaders. It is the tenth year of the siege – surely he would have been familiar with them by that time?
- Why in Book 9 is Phoenix with Agamemnon and not already staying in Achilles' hut?
- Why suddenly decide on a single combat between the husbands as a resolution in the tenth year of the war? Surely that would be the first reaction to the stealing of Helen, not a solution to be tried in the tenth year!
- If Paris is so despised by the Trojans, why have they not just handed him over to the Greeks?
- Why does Achilles refuse Agamemnon's offer of restitution in Book 9, and then say later that he would have accepted the things that he has refused here?

There are more examples, but a point made by many scholars is that these are just the sorts of irregularities that are part of oral poetry, and they are no proof in themselves of multiple authorship.

Structure

The most powerful argument in support of the *Iliad* being a work which was consciously composed, and not a random collection of stories added to at various times, is the structure of the epic. Any analysis that relates to just a selection of books cannot be comprehensive. However, by looking at just a few examples, we can see some clear patterns.

In looking at the structure, we shall examine:

- ring composition
- parallel episodes and characters
- formulae
- the unifying effect of the similes.

Ring composition

ring composition – the symmetrical arrangement of content

Ring composition means that the content is arranged in a symmetrical pattern, which could be expressed as ABCDCBA, with the scenes or images or words forming a sort of mirror image.

This composition can be seen as the basis of the epic as a whole. We will look just at the beginning and end of the poem to see how it works.

- An old man comes as a suppliant to ask for his child. In Book 1, Chryses is sent away; in Book 24, Priam is granted his request. In each case Apollo initiates the action.
- In Book 1, Chryses' supplication to Apollo is followed by nine days of plague, one day of prayers to Apollo and twelve days during which the gods are in Ethiopia. In Book 24, Achilles mistreats Hector's corpse for twelve days, there is one day when Priam visits Achilles for the return of the corpse, and there are nine days' preparation for the funeral of Hector. The pattern is 12, 1, 9 and 9, 1, 12.
- There is a scene on Olympus at the end of Book 1 and the beginning of Book 24.
- The first fighting on the battlefield, described in Book 3, is single combat, observed from the walls of Troy by Helen. The last fighting scene in Book 21 is single combat, observed from the walls of Troy by Priam and Hecabe.

The ring composition also operates at the level of speeches.

In Nestor's speech in Book 1 lines 259–274, there is an ABCBA pattern:

- **A** Nestor entreats Achilles to accept his advice.
- **B** He tells how his advice has been listened to in the past.
- **C** He tells his story.
- **B** He tells how others listened.
- **A** He entreats Achilles to accept his advice.

EXPLORE FURTHER

For a concise but comprehensive analysis of the structure of the *Iliad*, see the general introduction (pp. 32–37) to Peter Jones *Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on Three Translations* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2003).

Parallel episodes

Parallels are another characteristic of the composition of the *Iliad*. They can take the form of parallel descriptions, speeches, actions or characters. One can echo the other, or it can be a contrast.

There are parallels between books:

- There are assemblies in Books 1 and 19.
- In Book 1, Agamemnon is in the wrong and Achilles in the right; in Book 9 the positions are reversed.

There are groups of three:

- Sarpedon, Patroclus and Hector all die.
- In Book 6, Hector meets three women: Hecabe, Andromache and Helen.
- In Book 9, there are three very different speeches: from Ajax, Odysseus and Phoenix.

Study questions

1. What parallels are there between Book 3 and Book 22?
2. What instances of ring composition can you find in Book 4, 370–400, Book 6, 127–143, Book 9, 529–549 and Book 24, 599–620?

- In Book 24, there are three laments for Hector: from Hecabe, Andromache and Helen.

Parallel or contrasting characters

Hector, for example, contrasts with:

- Andromache, the wife who wants him to stay within the walls with his family;
- Paris, the brother who would rather linger in the bedroom with Helen than go out and fight; and
- Achilles, who fights for himself, not to protect others.

He mirrors other characters:

- Hector kills Patroclus and Achilles kills Hector.
- Hector's body is preserved by Apollo; Patroclus' body is preserved by Thetis.
- Hector and Patroclus wear Achilles' armour and are both killed.
- Hector and Patroclus are both too bold and could be said to bring about their own deaths.

Formulae

Formulae or repetitions can come in the form of epithets, phrases or complete scenes.

Epithets are words or short phrases used to identify the quality of a person or object. As Peter Jones puts it: 'Nouns come ready-packaged with epithets to fill certain metrical gaps in the line' (*Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on Three Translations*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2003). Their function may be primarily as verbal templates, but by virtue of the variety and sheer number of them, they colour the narrative and bring ordinary objects alive.

epithet – a word or phrase added to a name or object to denote its nature or qualities, e.g. 'the thoughtful Penelope'

Ships are, for example, black, beaked, fast, hollow and speedy; buildings are high-roofed and bronze-floored, beds soft and the storeroom sweet-smelling; horses are fine-maned, high-stepping or strong-footed. We have long-shadowed spears, pitiless bronze and bronze-tipped spears. Of places, there is rocky Pytho, well-founded Lesbos, the udder-rich soil of Argos, wind-swept Ilium and the fish-filled Hellespont.

Epithets convey the essential qualities of people. Heroes' epithets reflect prowess on the battlefield and those belonging to women focus on physical appearance.

As you read, look for **formulae** or phrases that are repeated regularly.

- As a warrior dies, 'darkness covered his eyes'.
- A warrior about to fight with another hero 'jumps to the ground from his chariot'.
- The end of a meal is expressed by 'when they had put aside their desire for eating and drinking'.
- A guest is frequently placed on 'a seat spread with purple rugs'.
- Heroes and immortals strap 'fine sandals' onto 'gleaming feet' before setting off.

Study question

Make a note of the epithets used of the heroes as you meet them. For example:

- Achilles: swift-footed, godlike
- Menelaus: master of the battle cry or auburn-haired
- Odysseus: quick-thinking, godlike

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Are formulae merely 'building blocks', or do they have some artistic merit? Jasper Griffin urges us not just to see formulae as dominated by metrical demands, but to listen to the poetry and consider what the formulae add to the literary qualities of the epic (*The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler, Chapter 10, 'The Speeches', p. 167).

How does the use of formulae make the telling of the story more engaging for the audience?

Repeated or type scenes

The warrior arms himself

PS

So he spoke, and Patroclus armed himself in the gleaming bronze. First he placed fine leg-guards on his shins, fitted with silver ankle-clips. Then he put on Achilles' body-armour, glittering and starry. Over his shoulder he slung his bronze, silver riveted sword, then his great, heavy shield. On his mighty head he placed his well-made helmet with a horse-hair crest, the plume nodding frighteningly from the top. Then he took up two powerful spears that fitted his grip. The only weapon of matchless Achilles he did not take was Achilles' long, thick, heavy spear. No Greek could wield this but Achilles, who alone knew how to handle it.

Book 16, 130–142, translation by Rieu, revised by Jones

Fighting scenes

Peter Jones describes them: 'There is a common pattern for A to throw at B, miss and kill C; for A to miss B and B to kill A (B is always a Greek here); for A to miss B, B to hit but not pierce the armour, and A to kill B (A again is always a Greek); and so on' (*Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on Three Translations*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2003).

ACTIVITY

Compare the description of Patroclus arming with the arming of Paris in Book 3 and Achilles in Book 19.

Death

The fatal blow is described in a formulaic way, but the entry and exit points of the weapon vary, and each account is gruesomely compelling.

Books 16 and 17 provide us with blows to the soft neck, the top of the leg where the muscle is thickest, on the neck below the ear, under the jaw, in the right shoulder, in the mouth and in the base of the belly. The weapon's trajectory takes it through the brain, to the base of the shoulder, through the tendons, or shearing through the bone. Sometimes we see the eyes flooded with blood or blood spurting through the nostrils. In all cases, death follows, in the form of a black cloud, a surge or a mist spreading over the eyes.

ACTIVITY

How many descriptions can you find that fit Jones' analysis of fighting scenes?

Speeches

Aristotle, a Greek philosopher writing in the fourth century BC, comments that Homer has the special merit of being the only poet who rightly appreciates the part he should take himself, because he speaks as little as possible in his own person, and allows his characters to speak for themselves.

Peter Jones tells us that there are 666 speeches in the *Iliad*, and that seventy-seven characters speak (including the horse, Book 19, 404). For much of the poem we listen to the words of the characters themselves. This shows Homer's concern not just with the action, but also with the characters' own perceptions and arguments.

ACTIVITY

Look for common features in the sacrifices and oaths in:

- Book 1, 36–42, 458–474
- Book 3, 103–105, 245–248, 268–280
- Book 19, 250–265.

ACTIVITY

Choose a speech or some dialogue from the *Iliad* that you find emotionally charged. Identify the emotions conveyed. Work on it in pairs as theatre-director and actor, deciding on what voice, tone and gestures you would use to make the delivery as effective as possible.

You might consider:

- Book 1, 225–244: Achilles to Agamemnon
- Book 1, 365–412: Achilles to Thetis
- Book 3, 390–417: Aphrodite to Helen
- Book 4, 51–67: Hera to Zeus
- Book 6, 440–465: Hector to Andromache
- Book 19, 287–300: Briseis to the dead Patroclus.

The function of the speeches

The speeches:

- **add to the dramatic impact of the performance**. Both Penelope and Odysseus in the *Odyssey* are moved to tears by the singing of a bard. In the time of Plato, a Greek philosopher writing in the fifth to fourth century BC, it is likely that emotion was an important part of the bard's performance. In the *Ion*, one of Plato's dialogues, Socrates talks to Ion, a rhapsode. The rhapsode describes how he has tears in his eyes as he recites, and the audience openly weep with emotion in response.
- **allow for variety of tone and pace.** Animated exchanges can be paired with longer speeches. Interchanges can take place in an assembly, palace or the Greek camp, on the seashore, the battlefield or Mount Olympus. The words can be threats, squabbles, prayers, oaths, supplications or laments.
- **allow a range of characters to take centre-stage.** The participants can be gods, heroes, Trojans, loyal wives or slaves (or even a horse).
- **permit any emotions.** Examples are rage, bitterness, tenderness, hope and despair.
- **allow heroes to demonstrate their prowess.** Heroes are articulate. Phoenix tells Achilles that Peleus had sent him to make his son a 'speaker of words', and the assembly is referred to as the place 'where men win glory'. Odysseus, for example, delivers a carefully presented appeal to Achilles in Book 9.

- **allow Homer to raise moral questions.** Hector berates his brother for his unheroic ways; Achilles attacks Agamemnon's attitude to fighting and rewards.
- **justify stories outside the Trojan cycle.** A character can indulge in a digression that is outside the Trojan cycle, but which entertains the audience. Agamemnon relates the story of Tydeus, and while defending himself in Book 23 he includes the story of Heracles; Phoenix tells his life-story about fleeing his father's rage and this leads to the long tale of Meleagros and the boar; Achilles tells the story of Niobe as a lesson in the importance of eating despite grief.
- **engage the audience in the arguments being put forward and the decisions to be taken.** In Book 9, Odysseus, Phoenix and Ajax try to persuade Achilles to accept Agamemnon's offer, and Achilles responds to each of them; Hecabe and Priam try to persuade Hector not to go out to fight.
- **allow Homer to portray characters by what they say, how they react and how they are addressed by others.**
- **allow the audience to judge the nature of the gods without any direct comment from the narrator.** An example is the conversations on Olympus in Book 1, 536–611 and Book 24, 22–142.
- **convey the solemnity of formal occasions or ritual acts.** Examples include oaths, vows, supplications, exhortations before battle, challenges, threats, mockery, or lamentations.

Similes

In a simple simile, a likeness is drawn: Menelaus acts like a lion, or Paris strides out like a stallion. Homeric similes are often extended so that a simple likeness is developed into a complete picture.

In the following simile, for example, Achilles is likened to a hawk:

> 'Like a mountain hawk, the fastest thing on wings, when it effortlessly swoops after a timid dove; under and away the dove dives off, and the hawk, shrieking close behind, strikes at it again and again in its determination to make a kill – so Achilles started off in hot pursuit, and Hector fled in terror before him.'
>
> (Book 22, 139–144)

Achilles' speed and accuracy in the hunt is the main area of comparison, but the extension also conveys a picture of Hector as the prey. The hawk darts with 'shrieking' and the dove is 'timid', expressing the relative power of the two fighters.

In Book 16, Patroclus and Sarpedon jump down from their chariots and are both likened to vultures; theirs is a violent fight, with equally matched contestants.

The individual similes are effective, but the similes together, as repeated features of the narrative, form a powerful tool in the shaping of the mood and atmosphere of the poem.

Repeated motifs, such as lions slaughtering a flock of sheep, wolves snatching kids or lambs, hunting dogs chasing fawns, or vultures swooping on a sick lamb or hare, take the fighting beyond the immediate context of the war, and fill the narrative with a sense of the desperate and bloody struggle for survival which is part of nature.

The enormity of war and the vulnerability of individuals are also conveyed in similes that draw on the forces of nature. Menelaus kills Euphorbus like a great gust of wind; the clouds of dust left by the army are like a mist brought by the South wind; the noise of battle is like a dark storm sent by Zeus, or like torrential streams; and the sound of Trojan horses is like the mighty roar of raging torrents. The shepherd deep in the mountains hears the torrents, but is powerless against them. The sounds and sights of battle come over as elemental forces of nature, too powerful for a human to control or resist.

The powerlessness of the victims of war is emphasised by the number of young in the similes: a heifer lows plaintively over its calf; a lion's cubs have been taken; a lamb is sick; and unfledged chicks need feeding.

The images in the similes build up to aid the characterisation. Achilles, for example, is likened to powerful beasts – a wolf, wild boar, hawk, hound and lion. Hector is a lion and an eagle, but also a fawn. Menelaus is a lion, but also a heifer when he stands impotent over the body of Patroclus.

The Trojans are hounds, but also cranes, ewes and ineffectual but noisy cicadas (insects). Paris' vanity is expressed in his likeness to a stable-fed stallion – not a self-sufficient wild animal – which tosses its head while its mane streams over its shoulders, and it goes down to the pastures where the mares are. Paris is much more at home in a domestic setting, caring for his appearance and surrounded by women, than out on the battlefield.

Amid the violence of war, similes are sometimes surprisingly ordinary, introducing with a jolt an image of domestic life into the horror of bloodshed. Fighters swarm around the body of Sarpedon as flies in a sheepfold buzz round buckets brimful with milk, and Athene deflects an arrow like a mother brushing a fly from her child. In the predominantly adult world of weapons and heroes, Achilles asks Patroclus why he is behaving like a child pulling at its mother's dress.

ACTIVITY

Add pictures or stickers of the appropriate animal/bird to the page of notes you have on a particular character, as visual prompts.

Description

Emotion is often expressed by a physical description

Emotion is expressed by its physical effects. When Achilles is angry with Agamemnon, he throws his staff to the ground (Book 1, 245). Agamemnon describes his fear with the observation, 'My heart is leaping out of my chest and my knees trembling' (Book 10, 95). Achilles groans and lies down on the beach in grief in Book 23. Sadness is expressed by flowing tears.

The physical outpouring of emotion was common in the ancient world, and it would not have appeared so melodramatic then as it might do now. When Hector learns of the death of Patroclus, he sprawls full-length in the dust, tearing at his hair and dirtying it with his own hands. Priam responds in a similar way to the death of Hector: his nights are spent tossing and turning while weeping for his loss. Women, in their role as mourners, provide a chorus of wailing, breast-beating and hair-tearing.

Sometimes the images are gentle, as when Thetis takes her son's head in her arms. At other times they are memorable by their gruesomeness, as when Hecabe describes Achilles as 'a monster whose very liver I would sink my teeth into and devour' (Book 24, 212).

FIGURE 6
Tomb painting of women wailing and pulling out hair, Paestum, Italy, fourth century BC.

Descriptions of gleaming cauldrons or golden two-handled cups bring a sense of wonder and richness to a heroic account about ancient times (and the golden age of the Mycenaean heroes must have been ancient for Homer's eighth-century audience).

Some images are striking by their very mundane nature: a distance in the camp is measured by how far oxen could pull a plough; a mule-yoke is 'made of box-wood and topped with a knob and well fitted with guide-rings'; a cloak is 'long [and] double-folding . . . with a thick nap on the wool'. These familiar images must have given a sense of reality to the mythical environment of the poem.

The heroes may be visited by the gods, but they are also described in very human terms. As Hector walks, 'the dark leather rim of the bossed shield slung over his shoulder tapped him above and below, on the ankles and on the back of the neck' (Book 6, 116–118)).

Sometimes a physical object is described in detail, as though to give it extra significance and emphasise its role in a forthcoming momentous event. The bow of Pandarus, which will be used to break the truce, is presented in close-up: it was made from 'horns measuring over a metre across' which a bow maker had 'made all smooth and put a golden hook for the bowstring at the end' (Book 4, 105–115). The mechanics of yoking the wagon cart that was to take Priam on his journey to Achilles' hut are described in technical detail (Book 24, 265–274). Homer draws attention to Achilles' lyre, as though it has significance beyond that of a musical instrument (Book 9, 185–191). Achilles is described as 'entertaining himself on a tuneful lyre, a beautifully ornate instrument with a silver crossbar'. The subsequent repetition of 'entertaining himself' makes the phrase into a ring composition and completes the scene. The vivid image which results seems to fuse man and lyre together, consolidating the picture of Achilles as the main subject of the bard's heroic song.

FIGURE 7
Gold cup with birds on the handles, called Nestor's cup, from Grave Circle A at Mycenae (Greece).

As Hector runs round the walls of Troy with Achilles in hot pursuit, Homer focuses on a 'wind-swept fig tree' and 'stone washing-places' (Book 22, 145–156) – hardly the stuff of heroic duels, one would think. However, the mundane presence of these objects

emphasises the heightened state of consciousness which accompanies moments of extreme tension, and has a powerful effect on Hector's state of mind at the prospect of his forthcoming death. The feminine associations of the washing troughs add further pathos, since Andromache is about to lose him, and he will leave all the women of Troy to their fate.

Homer can convey much with his use of small fleeting gestures. Nestor wakes up Diomedes with his foot (Book 10, 158), Astyanax shrinks away from Hector's helmet (Book 6, 466–470) and Ajax nods to Phoenix: 'but godlike Odysseus caught the signal' (Book 9, 223). Achilles gives a silent signal to Patroclus 'with a movement of his eyebrows' (Book 9, 620) when it is time to set up a bed for old Phoenix.

Sometimes sounds are dramatically loud: 'With every movement of the furious god, the arrows rattled on his shoulders, and his descent was like nightfall', and Apollo releases his arrows with a 'terrifying twang' (Book 1, 43–49), expressing his rage to everyone in the vicinity. Sounds can create an atmosphere of melancholy. For example, Chryses, after his plea for the return of his daughter has been brutally rejected by Agamemnon, 'went off without a word along the shore of the sounding sea' (Book 1, 34). Athene's clever ruse of sending a heron to guide Odysseus and Diomedes to the Trojan camp – 'the night was too dark for them to see the bird, but they heard it squawk' (Book 10, 275) – immediately heightens tension. It draws attention to the impossibility of using a more conventional torch in these circumstances, and it makes the audience want to listen out themselves for the bird's cry, and measure its effectiveness in this nocturnal orienteering exercise.

S & C

'Through parallels, contrasts, and juxtapositions of characters and actions, a dramatic structure is created that forces us to consider critically the traditional heroic world depicted in the poem and the contradictions inherent in this kind of heroism.'

Seth L. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (University of California Press, 1984)

How does the style of the *Iliad* lead you to consider the world of the hero more critically?

ACTIVITY

Tell the Trojan War story to someone. Notice how often you use epithets and repetitions, and how much you use direct speech to make the tale more dramatic. You may well begin with a formula: 'Once upon a time . . .'

TOPIC REVIEW

For a given passage, you should be able to answer the following sorts of questions:

1. How do Homer's descriptive techniques bring the narrative alive?
2. How effective are the techniques that Homer uses in a given passage?
3. How does direct speech make a given passage dramatic?
4. How does Homer make a given scene particularly vivid?
5. How does Homer use similes to help bring the characters alive and point to the differences between them?
6. How well do speeches convey character?
7. How important are parallels and contrasts in our appreciation of the themes of the *Iliad*?

Further Reading

William Allan, *Language, Style and Structure* in *Homer: The Iliad* (Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 23–33.
M. W. Edwards, 'Characteristics of Homeric Poetry', in *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (John Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 15–110.
Jasper Griffin on speeches in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (CUP, 2004)
Jasper Griffin, *Homer (Ancients in Action)* (Bloomsbury, 2013)
Peter Jones, *Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on Three Translations* (BCP, 2003), pp. 11–43.
Seth L. Schein, The *Mortal Hero, an Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (University of California Press, 1984)
Malcolm Willcock, *A Companion to the Iliad* (University of Chicago Press, 1976)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

The examination questions below focus on literary composition, but require knowledge of other topics. This is because it is important to assess the effect of the literary composition on the whole poem, and not just to spot the technique in isolation.

Passage A: *Iliad* Book 3, 21–37

> When Menelaus, beloved of Ares, saw him stride out from the host, he felt as the hungry lion does that finds the whole carcase of a wild goat, or an antlered stag, and tears it greedily, though nimble hounds and powerful huntsmen plague him: such was his pleasure when he saw godlike Paris, and primed for revenge on one who had wronged him he leapt down from his chariot in full armour.
>
> But Paris was sick at heart when he saw who had met the challenge, and shying from death shrank back into the ranks. As a man in a steep ravine starts when he sees a snake; trembles in every limb, and retreats with pallid face, so godlike Paris, fearing Atreides, hid among the throng of Trojan warriors.
>
> Trans: A. S. Kline

AS Level

1. How does Homer's use of language make this image especially vivid? Make four points and support each with reference to the passage. [8]
2. How important are speeches to characterisation in the *Iliad*? [25]

A Level

1. Explain how Homer makes this scene particularly vivid. [8]
2. To what extent do you agree that similes are important in conveying the nature of war in the *Iliad*? Use this passage as a starting point, and justify your response. [20]

1.2 The Heroic World: Characterisation and Themes

TOPIC OVERVIEW

- concept, values and behaviour of a hero including the ideas of *timē* (honour) and *kleos* (reputation)
- life in Troy and the Greek war camp
- characterisation of major and minor characters
- the portrayal of war
- death and mortality
- *menis* (wrath, anger)
- reconciliation

The following prescribed sources are covered in this topic:

- Homer, *Iliad*, Books 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24

Remember that you will be given credit in the exam if you study extra sources and make relevant use of them in your answers.

This topic gives you a picture of the characters, their environment and what it means to be a hero. It discusses the war, death and mortality, wrath and reconciliation, the themes which are at the heart of the *Iliad*.

THE CONCEPT, VALUES AND BEHAVIOUR OF A HERO INCLUDING THE IDEAS OF *TIMĒ* (HONOUR) *AND KLEOS* (REPUTATION)

The hero

What is a hero?

This component is called *The World of the Hero*. What is a hero? Before we grapple with the definition of a Homeric hero, we shall look at what characteristics we would expect to find in a hero of today. A discussion would probably reveal that there is no one profile that everyone would agree with.

ACTIVITY

Research 'hero' as used today. Bring examples to class. These might be from current news stories, films, the theatre, literature, our reading of history, from the world of sport or popular television programmes.

Discuss your findings and try to build up the profile of a hero.

You might ask questions such as whether a hero has to:

- be of a particular social status
- be famous
- be morally blameless
- do good acts for society
- have a particular appearance
- be admired by everyone
- act selflessly
- be associated with a particular act.

Finally, how much do you think fame or being remembered after death is an aspect of being a hero?

What makes a Homeric hero?

The question of what makes a hero in the world of Homer is a topic which scholars still discuss. If we are looking for a definition from the epics, we have to bear in mind that the poems may not give a consistent picture, and that interpretations of the heroes vary. Odysseus is different from Achilles, and Aeneas, although he shares some of Achilles' qualities, is very much a Roman figure.

Instances of advice from father to son give some indication: Glaucus is told that he should always 'be the best and excel all others' (Book 6, 208) and never disgrace his forefathers. Peleus tells his son Achilles the same thing, and Phoenix, explaining Peleus' intentions, tells Achilles: 'You were a mere boy then, with no experience of war, that great leveller, or of debate where men make their mark. It was to teach you these things, to make a speaker of you and a man of action, that he sent me with you' (Book 9, 440–443).

Heroes must be of noble birth

patronymic – the name of the father, given with, or instead of, the name of a character as in son of Peleus for Achilles, or son of Tydeus for Diomedes

A noble birth was the first qualification, and heroes are often referred to using a **patronymic**, or the name of their father. Diomedes is the son of Tydeus, Achilles son of Peleus, and Odysseus son of Laertes, for example. Some heroes have a divine parent: Achilles is the son of Thetis, a nymph, and Sarpedon is a son of Zeus.

Heroes must be mortal

Only mortal men can be heroes: they have their lives to lose, and so an ultimate opportunity to prove their glory. Gods cannot be real heroes because of their immortality. Fighting would involve no true test of prowess or risk of life for them.

Heroes attract the attention of the immortals

The gods support only heroes, and so to be helped by an immortal in the quest for glory is not a sign of weakness, but evidence of divine patronage and heroic status. In the *Iliad* Achilles is helped by Thetis, his mother, who enlists the support of Zeus; Hera and Athene intervene on the side of the Greeks, and Apollo favours Hector and the Trojans. Both sides therefore have divine assistance. The heroic status of the Greeks would be undermined if they were not fighting heroes. The immortals even look after the bodies of those they support: Apollo removes the body of Sarpedon and prevents Hector's corpse from being mutilated, and Thetis preserves Patroclus' body.

Some heroes are persecuted by the immortals. Hera and Athene, for example, are determined to destroy Hector and Troy.

Heroes have epithets which reflect their heroic qualities

The Greeks are 'bronze-clad', the Trojans 'horse-taming', for example. Achilles is 'swift-footed', Agamemnon 'wide-ruling', Patroclus 'great-hearted' and Odysseus 'resourceful', 'much-enduring' or 'godlike'. Menelaus is' master of the war cry' and we see Hector 'of the glinting helmet'. (See p. 17 for more on epithets.)

Fighting is an obligation to one's family, ancestors and community

Heroes represent their homeland, and it is a matter of honour for the homeland that they should return as heroes. The heroism of the ancestors enhances a hero's pedigree. The boar tusk helmet worn by Odysseus in Book 10 has a long provenance, so as he wears it, he appears to take on some of the glory of the previous owners.

Heroes fight for their own glory and as individuals

Achilles has come to Troy to fight, but points out he is not there for the sake of Menelaus. Helen is nothing to him. He is there to win himself ***kleos***. Heroes often fight in duels against those who have wronged them: Menelaus fights Paris, and Hector Achilles, and if they are wounded or killed, it is by another hero. They are never seriously wounded: this would prevent them from pursuing *kleos*. If they die, they usually have enough time to make a speech, as Sarpedon does, for example.

kleos – related to a Greek verb that means 'hear', this is a hero's fame and reputation, i.e. what people have heard about him

Heroes should be courageous

Hector points out to Paris, 'How the Greeks must cackle when they see us make a champion of a man because of his good looks, not his strength of purpose or courage' (Book 3, 44–45).

He later tells Andromache: 'I have trained myself always to be a good warrior, to take my place in the front line and try to win glory for my father and myself' (Book 6, 440–446).

Diomedes criticises Agamemnon: 'Zeus gave you the sceptre of power and the honour it brings with it, but he did not give you courage – and courage is the secret of authority' (Book 9, 37–39).

Heroes look impressive

They are of huge stature and strength: when Sarpedon dies, his collapse is likened to an oak tree being felled. A hero's imposing appearance is particularly evident when he is arming before battle. The most spectacular arming scene is that of Achilles putting on the armour that Thetis has just brought.

However, Odysseus' appearance is not described in terms of beauty: he reminds Priam of a 'fleecy ram' (3, 197–198), and Antenor explains that once they had heard him speak, they were not put off by his appearance (Book 3, 224).

Their armour is a reflection of their greatness. Achilles' armour is made by Hephaestus. Only Achilles can lift his massive spear, and his horses are immortal. We know from the first that Dolon, whose appearance is 'certainly unattractive' (Book 10, 316), cannot be a hero. The care that a hero takes of his body is reflected in the last image of Book 10, when Diomedes and Odysseus, having completed their successful night raid on the Trojan camp, step into polished tubs for baths, and rub themselves down with oil, a typical action repeated through both epics.

FIGURE 8
This krater, or wine mixing bowl, shows Hector and Achilles fighting. Notice that the heroes are shown nude. Young muscular bodies were something to be admired. Hector leans back as Achilles lunges at him.

Heroes are ferocious when they fight

Animal imagery is often used to describe heroes: they are like lions, bulls, boars and hunting dogs. In Book 10 Agamemnon wears the blood-red hide of a great tawny lion. Dolon, the Trojan traitor, wears a grey wolf's pelt, marking his inferiority as well as his savagery.

Heroes fight with equal determination in sporting contests: they respect their opponents, but winning and getting the reward is their objective.

A formula is often followed when the hero enters battle

- The hero puts his armour on, and each piece is described.
- The hero fights valiantly, killing of a number of named individuals.

- There is panic among the enemy.
- The hero calls upon the gods, perhaps swearing an oath.
- There may be a duel with a prominent member of the enemy.
- The hero makes a speech of triumph over the enemy.
- Spoils are taken, with particular reference to the opponent's armour.

A hero is often skilled with words

Winning an argument is an important victory over an opponent, and appealing to public opinion and gaining support enhances the hero's reputation. Odysseus is particularly good at using cunning words: they are his main weapon in his pursuit of glory.

Using words to frighten an opponent before battle and mock him in defeat is acceptable.

There are several instances where the importance of speaking is mentioned. Achilles has been trained to speak in the assembly 'where men win glory' (Book 1, 490), and Phoenix says that Peleus entrusted Achilles to him, 'to make a speaker of you and a man of action' (Book 9, 443). When Helenus calls upon Hector, he says to him, 'You have never failed us in the council chamber or on the battle-field' (Book 6, 78).

Study question
Read through the death scenes for Sarpedon, Patroclus and Hector, noting the content of any speeches made. Do the speeches have anything in common?

Self-control

A hero acts rashly in his desire to fight and get glory for himself, but there are limits which he should observe. Patroclus, for example, exceeds his brief: he was not destined to kill Hector and take Troy, and he seems presumptuous for trying. Achilles' father had warned him: 'Keep a firm grip on that proud spirit of yours. Fellow feeling is better. Avoid destructive quarrels, and Greeks young and old will look up to you all the more' (Book 9, 253–258). A hero dedicates captured armour to the gods.

However, Achilles loses all restraint in his determination to avenge the death of Patroclus.

Honour among heroes

Although heroes fight to the death and have no mercy for their opponents, there is an agreement that the dead hero's body will be returned to his family for burial. Achilles explicitly excuses himself from that custom when he tells Hector, 'Friendship between us is impossible and there will be no truce of any kind' (Book 22, 266).

Heroes abide by the laws of Zeus, and ***xenia*** can override killing in battle. When Diomedes and Glaucus realise that they are bound by the links of guest-friendship, they stop fighting and exchange armour.

xenia – guest-friendship: the agreement between host and guest whereby a host respects and looks after the guest, giving them what they need, and the guest respects the host

Heroes maintain civilised behaviour

Communal eating is a mark of civilisation. It is often associated with gods and sacrifices – sacrifice providing the meat for barbecues – and the laws of hospitality are sacred to Zeus. Heroes eat meat. The heroes in Book 9 eat together in Agamemnon's hut when they are deciding on a strategy, and again in Achilles' hut before they present to him Agamemnon's offer of reconciliation. Achilles' having a meal with Priam is one signal

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'Yet their heroic power is double-edged, because it can also lead to less desirable qualities: excessive anger, violence, cruelty, pride, recklessness, and egotism. So there is a tension within heroism itself in that the very energy which makes the heroes outstanding is also the source of their instability and danger (both to themselves and to others).' (William Allan, *Homer: The Iliad*, Bloomsbury, 2012)

To what extent is Allan's statement true of Achilles?

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'As with Hector, Agamemnon's and Achilles' portrayal throughout the poem explores the potential conflict within heroism between individual ambition and collective good, and the dangers of putting personal honour above all else.'

(William Allan, *Homer: The Iliad*, Bloomsbury, 2012)

With detailed reference to the text, illustrate Allan's statement.

of his return to civilised behaviour after the anger which had led him into inhuman action.

Showing emotion is heroic

The greater the hero, the greater the capacity for feeling powerful emotion. Achilles is not diminished by his extreme grief at the death of Patroclus, and heroes cry freely.

Timē

Timē comes in the form of the bestowing of gifts upon the hero, and a hero will measure his status by the number and value of the gifts he receives. To the modern mind this acquisitive, grasping, attitude towards gifts suggests shallow materialism, and receiving a girl as a prize is totally despicable, but to a Homeric hero, gifts were a tangible measure of the honour owed to him.

Agamemnon, as commander- in-chief, has the pick of the booty. Having to return the girl Chryseis is a great blow to his public honour. His inflicting the same public humiliation on Achilles by taking Briseis is what causes the wrath of Achilles. In Book 23, public honour and valuable prizes are the goals of the competitors, who all aim to show their excellence and win their events. However, attitudes are different from those in Book 1. Antilochus and Menelaus are willing to give up their prizes, and Odysseus and Ajax accept the decision of a draw.

Phoenix urges Achilles with the words: 'No; come while gifts are still to be had, and the Greeks will treat you like a god. If you plunge into the killing fields with no such gifts, you will not be so respected, even though you turn defeat into victory' (Book 9, 602–5). Achilles' own timē is on his mind, even though he is not prepared to fight. Just before Patroclus leaves, he warns him to follow his orders exactly, saying, '. . . don't entertain any dreams of fighting on without me against these war- loving Trojans. You will diminish my honour' (Book 16, 89–90). In Book 24, Achilles justifies his action through the wealth he has obtained from Priam. He calls upon Patroclus not to be angry with him for having released Hector's body to Priam, explaining 'The ransom he paid me was a worthy one' (Book 24, 594). It follows that if public honour is so crucial, a hero who feels belittled, or even that his reputation is being slightly questioned, will act decisively to retrieve his honour.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Sarpedon discusses the obligation to act with honour:

> 'Glaucus, why are we most of all singled out for honour at home in Lycia, with pride of place, the choicest meat and never empty cups? Why do they all look up to us as gods? And why do we cultivate a great estate on the banks of the River Xanthus, with lovely orchards and splendid fields of wheat? All this now obliges us to take our places in the front ranks of the Lycians and fling ourselves into the flames of battle. Only then will our Lycian men-at-arms say of us: "Well! These are no dishonourable lords of Lycia that rule over us and eat fat sheep and drink the best sweet wine: they are indomitable and fight in the forefront of the Lycians."
>
> 'My friend, if, after living through this war, we could be sure of becoming ageless and immortal, I should not fight in the front line nor send you out into battle where men win glory. But the world is not like that. A thousand demons of death hover over us, and nobody can escape or avoid them. So in we go, whether we yield the victory to some other man, or he to us.'

Translation Rieu, Book 12, 310–328

FIGURE 9
This bronze statuette from the fourth century BC shows the enormous body of Sarpedon being carried away by the winged figures of Sleep and Death. Scenes based on mythological events gave sculptors (and vase-painters) the opportunity to use their imagination and creativity, since the stories were more to do with fantasy than real life.

Kleos

Being talked about is a conscious aim of the hero, because without *kleos*, heroic status is impossible. Performing deeds that will earn *kleos* is always at the forefront of a hero's mind. Fame is important, at any cost, for with great fame comes immortality. In the *Odyssey*, King Alcinous says that the gods weave 'the web of mortal ruin, to make a song for those as yet unborn'.

Achilles chooses a short, famed life over a longer life lived in obscurity. He tells his comrades that he has two fates, two possible death dates. 'If I stay and fight it out round Ilium, there is no home-coming for me, but there will be eternal glory instead. If I go back to the land of my fathers, my heroic glory will be forfeit, but my life will be long and I shall be spared an early death' (Book 9, 410–416).

When the heroes go to Achilles' hut, they find him singing tales of men's glory. Clearly he intends to be sung about, and known to future generations. The aged Nestor implies that the ancient heroes were even more glorious.

EXPLORE FURTHER

For more on *kleos*, see:
William Allan, 'The Hero and Homeric Society', in *Homer: The Iliad* (Bloomsbury, 2012), pp. 35–47.

B. Graziosi, 'Part II The *Iliad*' in *Homer* (OUP, 2016).

Study questions

1. This obsession with *kleos*, or immortality through fame, may seem remote to us. But how many people leave gifts in their will with the aim of ensuring that their name will live on after their death?
2. Do we ever read in the news of people who court the media in order to be celebrities?
3. Are these people the equivalent of the ancient heroes?
4. Assess a Homeric hero in the light of today's values.

LIFE IN TROY AND THE GREEK WAR CAMP

Life in Troy

Our view of the physical appearance of Troy is limited. Homer is more intent on portraying the families and state of mind of those who inhabit it. The Trojan heroes have the same values as the Greeks and worship the same gods. The Trojan allies, who speak different languages, are likened to ewes in a rich man's farm yard, waiting to be milked and bleating. The ewes of the simile bleat incessantly because they can hear their young lambs. This simile reflects a key aspect of Troy: the vulnerability of the women and children whom the men are trying to protect. Dolon the spy, when asked about the night-time guard, explains that the allies sleep without watchmen, since they have no families to protect.

The city walls represent the only thing between life in the city and the Greeks who have been encamped outside for nearly ten years – the only thing between life and death. They are high, and so serve as a vantage point for the inhabitants. Going onto the walls is synonymous with getting the latest news. In Book 3, the Trojan elders gather there to watch the single combat, and Helen answers Priam's questions about various Greek warriors. In Book 6, Hector is met at the Scaean gates by the wives and daughters, all anxious to know about their relatives.

The walls feature in the dramatic death scenes, since the fighting takes place outside the gates. In Book 16 Patroclus, overconfident after the killing of Sarpedon, tries to climb the high angle of the wall three times. Hector who is waiting at the Scaean gates, sees him and, urged on by Apollo, goes on to kill him. There is a similar scene outside the walls in Book 22. This time it is Hector who is the victim.

The walls feature again in Book 24 when from the heights of Troy, Cassandra sees Priam approaching with Hector's body.

Homer presents a picture of domesticity within the walls. The imminent destruction seems more shocking if Troy still has some of its treasures, and life continues with its daily routine.

Not much is said about the Trojan men. They are either heroes like Hector and Paris, or part of the indiscriminate hordes who buzz like cicadas or shout out like cranes.

Inside, the city is portrayed as the realm of the women. In Book 3, for example, we see Helen, who is making a web of purple cloth for a cloak. On it she weaves scenes of the conflict between the Trojans and Greeks, a war that has happened because of her. She uses her weaving as a way of telling her story.

Homer describes the palace as beautiful and furnished with porticoes of polished stone. The bedrooms of Priam's fifty sons and twelve daughters are set out in an orderly plan. This emphasis on order and solidity is ironic, given what we know will soon happen.

Hecabe, as queen, is concerned with the safety of the city, and she is given the responsibility of making offerings to Athene, who is hostile to Troy. Hecabe gives instructions to her servants, gets carefully kept robes from the storeroom, and makes her way to the temple in the company of many old women. The offerings do no good, and the glorious textiles offered in vain by pitiful women create a picture of great wealth, but also of impotence and despair, inside Troy.

FIGURE 10
Weaving is women's work. Here in modern Turkey, the tradition continues.

The encounter between Hector and Andromache sums up the level of emotion in the city. She has gone running to the wall in a frenzy, and is wailing and lamenting on the tower. She meets him with her tears flowing, and begs him to stay in the city. She is already devastated by the deaths of her family: her father and seven brothers had been previously killed in one day by Achilles. She is haunted by the thought of her husband being killed too. She has already identified the weak spot in the city defences, and tries to persuade her husband to go to the wall by the fig-tree rather than fight on the plain. He goes out to fight, and she returns to the loom and distaff and the loud lamentations of the women. Such is their level of fear and despair that they are lamenting though Hector is still alive and their city still standing.

The Trojans are united in their fear of the Greeks, but there are tensions in the city. The citizens are paying for a war which they do not believe in. As Hector explains to his allies, 'I impoverish my own people by demanding they supply you with gifts and provisions and so keep your courage high' (Book 17, 225–226).

Not only is Paris unpopular – 'they loathed him, all of them, like black death' (Book 3, 454) – but Priam has other sons who are arrogant and unscrupulous according to Menelaus (Book 3, 106). Priam himself berates them, a 'disgraceful crew – swindlers and show-offs every one of you, stars of the song-and-dance routine, when you aren't looting your own people of their sheep and kids' (Book 24, 259–262).

Life in the Greek war camp

The Greeks are camped outside the walls of Troy and along the shore, with each contingent close to their own ships. Achilles announces that he will not think of fighting until Hector has broken through the Greek defences and set the ships on fire. The Greeks need their ships for their eventual departure, but also for regular supplies: in Book 9 there is talk of Agamemnon's daily delivery of wine from Thrace.

Homer tells us little about the organisation of the camp; military strategy and the life of the ordinary soldier is not his interest. We find out about it when it provides a backdrop to deeds of the heroes. We know that on the night of the embassy to Achilles, Nestor sends out seven commanders of the guards, each with a hundred men, who take their positions between the ditch they have dug and their defensive wall. They light fires and prepare their supper.

The nocturnal expedition of Odysseus and Diomedes in Book 10 provides more information. It is, of course, dark and there is a danger of getting lost on the many paths across the camp. The leaders camp near their troops, mostly in huts, though Diomedes sleeps outside his hut, his armour ready to put on. After the foray into Rhesus' camp, Odysseus and Diomedes plunge into the nearby sea and then wash in polished tubs and rub themselves with oil – the Greek camp maintained some elements of a civilised life.

Book 24 gives us more information about the living spaces of the leaders. Achilles' hut is large, made of pine and with a thatched roof. It is surrounded by a yard and a fence with a gate. The security is tight: it needs three Greeks to move the bolt and three to open the door (though Achilles, of course, can open it by himself). The interior is spacious enough to slaughter a sheep in, and for the meal that follows. After the meal the serving women put up two beds in the portico for Priam and his herald, and Achilles sleeps in his well-built hut with Briseis. We know too, that seven other women have been given to Achilles: was there room for them too? The point is that Homer makes the hut big enough to be a suitable stage for the events in Book 24, and that is what matters.

CHARACTERISATION OF MAJOR AND MINOR CHARACTERS

You should be familiar with the following names. The major and minor characters are discussed below.

- Achilles
- Adrestus
- Aeneas
- Alexandros/Paris
- Agamemnon
- Ajax son of Oïleus
- Ajax son of Telamon
- Andromache
- Antilochus
- Aphrodite
- Apollo
- Briseis
- Calchas
- Chryseis
- Chryses
- Deiphobus
- Diomedes
- Dolon
- Glaucus
- Hecabe
- Hector
- Helen
- Hephaestus
- Hera
- Hermes
- Menelaus
- Nestor
- Odysseus
- Pandarus
- Paris
- Patroclus
- Peleus
- Phoenix
- Polydamus
- Poseidon
- Priam
- Sarpedon
- Thetis
- Xanthus
- Zeus

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

As Silk puts it, 'Perhaps the most alien feature of Homer's people is that, in general, they seem to show no capacity for development: character is conceived as static' (*Homer: The Iliad (Landmarks of World Literature)* (CUP, 1987)).

With reference to Achilles, to what extent do you agree with this statement?

The Greeks

The Greek heroes have their individual characteristics. They emerge through the imagery surrounding them, their speeches and what others say to and about them. Their characters are set at the beginning, and their epithets tell us their essential qualities.

Achilles

Books 1, 9, 16, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24.

The **proem** begins with Achilles' anger, and this is what dominates the first book.

By the time we meet Achilles, Agamemnon has already brought down a plague on the Greeks through his treatment of Chryses. It is Achilles who calls the assembly and suggests consulting Calchas the seer, who is too frightened to criticise Agamemnon and looks to Achilles for protection. Already Achilles is presented as a figure of authority, and, compared with Agamemnon, a sympathetic one.

Agamemnon has been deprived of his prize, and in return is taking Briseis from Achilles. Achilles feels particularly affronted because it is a cowardly and inferior man who is insulting him. At the centre of the argument is honour (*timē*). In addition, Achilles is aware of his mortality. He has little time left on earth to gain his *kleos*.

His anger erupts: it is *menis*, the fierce and violent wrath of a god. It causes him to refuse to fight, and more significantly, to ask his mother to call upon Zeus to 'fling the Greeks back on their ships, pen them hard against the sea and massacre them' (Book 1, 407–10). Can we respect a hero who condemns his own side to destruction?

Achilles' mother, Thetis, is an immortal, and there is in him an element which reaches beyond the realm of man. By using his divine connection and having his request granted, he ends up in a situation which has unexpected outcomes: he is responsible for the death of Patroclus. He might have been wiser not to give into his *menis* and call for divine help in his rage.

In Book 9, Ajax, Odysseus and Phoenix go to his hut to ask him to join in the fighting. He is with Patroclus and playing his lyre when they arrive. He welcomes his guests, and offers them a meal. He may be sociable, but he is unwilling to accept Agamemnon's

proem – the first few lines of an epic, in which the poet sets out the main themes of his work, and often calls on one of the Muses

Study questions

1. Does Achilles reject heroic values in his speech to Odysseus in Book 9?
2. What light does Phoenix throw on Achilles' life and character in Book 9?

EXPLORE FURTHER

M. W. Edwards in *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (John Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 214–237 discusses in detail the forces acting upon Achilles.

offer. Odysseus begs him, 'But if your loathing of Agamemnon, gifts and all, outweighs every other consideration, at least take pity on the Greeks in their camp.' Phoenix advises him, 'Master your tremendous pride, Achilles.' Ajax comments, 'Achilles has hardened his once noble heart and become quite unreasonable.'

Achilles contemplates, 'If I go back to the land of my fathers, my heroic glory will be forfeit, but my life will be long and I shall be spared an early death.' It seems as though he might return home, but finally he declares, 'I shall not contemplate bloodshed and warfare again until Hector reaches the huts and ships of my Myrmidons.' The question of why he refuses is still debated by scholars.

In Book 16, Achilles listens to Patroclus' speech, and acknowledges that the Greeks need help. He recognises that he 'was wrong in supposing a man could nurse his anger for ever', but Agamemnon has not apologised, and so Achilles feels bound by his declaration not to fight until the Trojans start to burn the ships. He does, however, allow his friend to fight in his armour. He gives his troops a rousing speech. But he still has his own heroic status in mind, as he warns Patroclus not to do more than drive the Trojans away from the ships.

Study question

'Achilles is torn between concern for the battered Greeks, sympathy for Patroclus's grief, longing to return to battle himself, desire for restoration of his own honor, need to stand by his own words, and above all fear for the safety of Patroclus.'

(M. W. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (John Hopkins University Press, 1987)

What evidence can you find in Book 16 to support Edwards' assertion?

In Book 18, the death of Patroclus brings Achilles back into the fighting. He renounces the anger he had felt towards Agamemnon: 'But however much it still rankles, it is now over and done with: let it go. We must master our pride' (lines 112–113). The anger towards Agamemnon, however, is replaced by an even more savage rage: his determination to avenge Patroclus and kill Hector. He vows to Patroclus, 'At your pyre I am going to cut the throats of a dozen splendid sons of Troy, to vent my anger at your death.'

Homer describes him as 'spread out in the dust', a description used for dead bodies. When Thetis finds Achilles on the beach, she takes his head in her arms and laments, as though he is already dead. She tells him, 'You are doomed to die immediately after Hector.' He cannot fight until he gets his new armour, but his presence, with a blaze of light shining from his head, and his war cry, are enough to throw the Trojans into chaos and allow the Greeks to retrieve the body of Patroclus.

Study question

To what extent has Achilles resolved his anger by the end of Book 23?

With his new armour in Book 19, Achilles burns to fight Hector. He is reconciled with Agamemnon, who returns Briseis to him, but his mind is dominated by this new anger:

'None of your proposals interests me – only slaughter and bloodshed and the groans of the dying' (Book 19, 213–214).

He meets Hector in Book 22 and swoops on him like a hawk on a dove. He is pitiless, and seems to lose all humanity when he tells Hector that he would like to eat his raw flesh; then, having killed him, Achilles goes on to defile the body. The revenge killing does not lessen his grief about the death of Patroclus.

A dream makes him feel his loss even more keenly, and finally, when he puts Patroclus on the pyre, he realises that he will never return home to see his own father, and that in a sense, this is his funeral too. At the funeral games that follow, he has lost his obsessive grief, and we see him as a good leader generously giving prizes and enjoying the sport. He may have accepted the death of Patroclus, but he has not given up his anger towards Hector. Only when Thetis tells him that he must return the body, and he is moved by the sight of Priam, does he think of his own father and regain his humanity.

Study questions

1. Has your view of Achilles changed in the light of your understanding of what makes a Greek hero?
2. T. S. Eliot referred to him as a 'superhuman adolescent'. Is Achilles just a young man who needs to grow up?

Agamemnon

Book 1; Book 3, 455–461; Book 4, 148–432; Book 38–66, Book 9, 1–181, 669–712; Book 10, 1–130; Book 19; Book 23, 110–160.

Agamemnon is the leader of the Greeks by virtue of having the largest number of ships. His treatment of Chryses in Book 1 is harsh: he callously tells the priest that his daughter will have to serve Agamemnon's bed, and he shows no respect for Chryses' age or status. Calchas, the seer, is afraid of Agamemnon, and asks for Achilles' protection. When challenged, Agamemnon is furious: 'his heart seethed with fury, and his eyes were like flames of fire.' He is arrogant and pitiless, and when his brother is going to spare a prisoner, he tells him, 'No, we are not going to leave a single one of them alive, down to the babies in their mothers' wombs – not even they must live' (Book 6, 57–60).

In Book 9, he admits his despair to the assembly, and is about to leave Troy, like a coward. However, in his subsequent rallying of the troops, he comes over as a competent leader. His reparation to Achilles in Book 9 is generous, but one of his conditions is that Achilles should acknowledge him as leader. When there is finally a reconciliation in Book 19, he cannot admit guilt, but passes on responsibility for his actions to the gods, who he says had tricked him.

Study question

Are Achilles' insults in Book 1 justified by what you know about Agamemnon's behaviour in the *Iliad*?

Antilochus

Book 17, 652–700; Book 18, 1–34; Book 23, 261–618.

He is the son of Nestor, and a young man. In Book 18 he is entrusted with the task of delivering the news of Patroclus' death to Achilles. In the chariot race in Book 23, his youthful ambition is set against the experience and wisdom of Menelaus.

Diomedes

Book 4, 364–421; Book 6, 12–19, 119–236, 277–311; Book 9, 31–51, 695–713; Book 10; Book 23, 373–401.

FIGURE 11
This gold mask was declared by Schliemann in 1876 to be 'the face of Agamemnon'. It could never be, because it is of the wrong date, but nevertheless we still call it Agamemnon, so keen are we to have contact with one of Homer's heroes.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

The following statements from scholars will give you a good overview of the issues surrounding Achilles. But the real work and learning will come from the discussion they generate.

- 'The most important theme of the *Iliad* is Achilles' growing recognition of his mortality.' (Elton Barker and Joel Christensen, *Homer: A Beginner's Guide*, Oneworld, 2013)
- 'It is clear that Achilles is an uncomfortable and even destructive presence in the heroic world.' (Michael Silk, *Homer: The Iliad (Landmarks of World Literature)* (CUP, 1987)
- 'There is tension at the heart of the *Iliad* between the hero's natural desire for the honour and status to be gained by winning, and his obligations to others to co-operate with them and ensure that their honour is not compromised by his search for his own.' (Peter Jones, *Homer's Iliad: A Companion to Three Translations,* BCP, 2003)
- 'Heroic behaviour and its consequences in the person of Achilles are the central subject around which Homer builds the *Iliad.* Within it are contained issues of self-control, power, authority and compromise (or lack of it) which resonate far beyond the military context in which they are set. Above it rises the magnificent figure of Achilles, obsessive, complex, extreme, austere, reaping the whirlwind of the decisions he freely makes.' (Peter Jones, *Homer's Iliad: A Companion to Three Translations*, BCP, 2003)
- 'The character of Achilles is not good in any other sense than that he excels others in physical prowess and is the best fighter.' (Robin Sowerby, *Homer: The Iliad*, Longman, 1985)

ACTIVITY

Imagine you are conducting an assessment of Agamemnon's leadership skills in response to complaints made about him.

Draw up the criteria assessment (for example, the ability to inspire confidence in troops) and assess Agamemnon's competence.

Is any other hero better suited as leader of the Greeks? If so, make your case for a new leader.

Diomedes is a young and fearsome warrior who creates panic among the enemy. Helenus says that he is 'quite uncontrollable and not a man can hold him' (Book 6, 100). Hecabe makes offerings to Athene in the hope that she will protect Troy from Diomedes.

He takes criticism from Agamemnon: 'He dutifully accepted the rebuke from the leader he respected' (Book 4, 402), and speaks his mind about Achilles: 'He is an arrogant man at the best of times, and now you have merely reinforced that arrogance . . . he'll

fight again when his heart tells him so' (Book 9, 699). Nestor praises Diomedes' judgement, telling him, 'in debate you have no rival of your age' (Book 9, 53).

He is always ready to play his part. He leaps from his chariot, and sleeps outside his tent with his armour beside him, ready for action. He volunteers for the spying mission in Book 10 and kills Dolon. He is a winner in the games in Book 23.

Menelaus

Book 3, 21–380; Book 4, 112–220; Book 6, 37–65, Book 17; Book 23, 401–611.
As the husband of Helen, Menelaus is central to the war. We first meet him leaping down from his chariot, as joyous as 'a lion that has found a carcass' at the prospect of taking on Paris in single combat. He is the superior warrior, but is cheated out of his victory by Aphrodite. She shatters his sword and removes Paris from the combat. Zeus himself declares that 'victory has certainly gone to warlike Menelaus' (Book 4, 13).

He is impressive to look at: Priam talks of his height and broad shoulders. He can speak well. Priam says he 'spoke fluently, not at great length but very clearly, being a man of few words who kept to the point' (Book 3, 210–215). However, in comparison with Odysseus, he is less imposing when sitting down, and the inferior speaker.

He is milder than his brother Agamemnon. He is about to spare the life of Adrestus (Book 6, 37–65), when his brother makes him change his mind, and Agamemnon says of him, 'he is often inclined to do nothing and let things slide, not through laziness or stupidity, but because he looks to me to take the lead' (Book 10, 120–123).

In battle he is a lion, but other, much milder images are used of him too. Athene protects him from Pandarus' arrow 'like a mother brushing a fly away from her gently sleeping child' (Book 4, 130), and the blood on his thigh is likened to the way a woman stains ivory with purple dye (Book 4, 141).When he guards Patroclus' body he is likened to 'a mother-cow' who 'stands protectively over the first calf she has brought into the world' (Book 17, 1–5).

In Book 17 he worries about his reputation, as heroes do. He can no longer protect the body of Patroclus, and justifies himself: 'But why talk to myself like this? When a man decides, without the good will of the gods, to fight another who enjoys their favour, he has disaster coming to him' (Book 17, 97–99).

In the funeral games, the episode with Antilochus and the mare is interesting. Menelaus feels aggrieved because of the cheating. However, once Antilochus has admitted that Menelaus should have come second, and is his elder and better, he accepts the apology, saying, 'I will give you the mare, though she is mine, to show our countrymen here I'm not arrogant or inflexible' (Book 23, 609–611). Like Achilles, he shows himself able to act with generosity towards his companions.

Study question
'Menelaus is the star of this book' (Peter Jones, *Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on Three Translations*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2003). What evidence can you find to support Jones' assessment of Book 17?

Nestor

Book 1, 245–284; Book 4, 293–325; Book 6, 66–72; Book 9, 52–184; Book 10, 55–59; Book 23, 307–350.
Nestor is the old and sensible presence. He is eloquent, and his speech 'flowed sweeter than honey off his tongue'. He is wise, telling Agamemnon not to take Briseis, and

advising Achilles to put aside his anger. In Book 4, Nestor encourages the troops to fight, and in Book 6 tells them not to loot, but to concentrate on killing Trojans. He proposes a special council in Book 9, and nominates the leaders to send on the embassy to Achilles. The night mission in Book 10 is his idea.

Odysseus

Book 3, 191–224; Book 4, 329–363; Book 9, 192–308, 669–696; Book 10; Book 19, 154–237.

Odysseus' standing among the Greeks is evident from his having been entrusted to return Chryseis to her father. He is shorter than Agamemnon, though broader across the shoulders and chest. Priam describes him as looking like 'some thick-fleeced ram'. In comparison with Menelaus, he has impressive dignity, and his words come out 'like the snows of winter'. His main epithet is 'resourceful', and Helen describes him as 'master of all kinds of trickery and clever plans'. He is selected to lead the embassy to Achilles in Book 9, and Diomedes chooses him as a companion on the spying mission in Book 10.

Study questions

1. Peter Jones describes Odysseus' speech in Book 9 as 'a brilliantly structured rhetorical performance, in five parts' (*Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on Three Translations*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2003). Go through the speech, assessing what persuasive techniques he uses. What does Odysseus leave out of his speech, and what does that tell you about his character?
2. What qualities does Odysseus show on the night-time expedition in Book 10?

FIGURE 12
Vase painters used Homer for their themes. This is a red-figure kylix showing Achilles bandaging Patroclus' arm. What aspect of their relationship is shown here? Can you see any connection to the *Iliad* in this painting?

Patroclus

Book 1, 33–346; Book 9, 189–222; Book 16; Book 17; Book 23, 60–108 (ghost).

The first time we meet Patroclus, he is bringing Briseis out of the hut to hand her over to Agamemnon, and in Book 9 he cooks for Achilles' guests. He had spent his youth at the house of Peleus (23, 82–92) with Achilles, and their relationship seems almost domestic. He is described by others as kind and gentle. When he is distressed by the Trojans' victories, and he wants to go out and fight, Achilles affectionately mocks him, likening him to a little girl. He is Achilles' charioteer. 'How kind he was to [the horses], always washing them down with clean water and grooming their manes with olive oil!' remembers Achilles (23, 281–282).When he is armed and fighting, we see him as a heroic warrior. Not satisfied with repelling the Trojans from the Greek

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'It is not Patroclus' fighting ability that will be his undoing. Quite the reverse: it will be his desire to go too far and refusal to rein himself in that will kill him' (Peter Jones, *Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on Three Translations*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2003).

Do you agree with this assessment?

ships, he defies Achilles' instructions and pursues them right to the walls of the city. He kills the Trojan ally Sarpedon in a prolonged encounter, and then meets his own death at the hands of Hector. Although Patroclus is dead by Book 17, he is pivotal to the action thereafter, since his death causes Achilles to return to the fighting, and to be consumed by grief and anger. His ghost appears to Achilles in Book 23.

Study question
Study Andromache's lament for Hector (Book 24, 725–745). How does it progress from past, to present, to future?

Trojans

Andromache

Book 6; Book 22, 438–515; Book 24, 718–745.

As the wife of Hector, Andromache represents the women of Troy and the suffering which awaits them when Troy falls, but she is also a character with some individuality. In Book 6 she has not gone to the temple with the other women, but is on the towers with their son, wailing in lamentation. She has seen that the walls are most vulnerable by the fig tree, and begs her husband (to no avail) to defend the city from near the wall, rather than go out on the plain and fight. She tries to show Hector the folly of going out, and reminds him that to her he is 'father and mother and brother' as well as husband. Achilles has killed her father and brothers, and so she has no male relative to protect her. Her affectionate relationship with her husband is shown when Hector says goodbye to Astyanax, and mother and father burst out laughing at the child's fear of his father's helmet. As Andromache laughs through her tears, Hector hands his son back and tries to comfort her distress. Returned to the palace, she stirs the women to lamentation, mourning her husband though he is still alive.

See also 'Relationships between men and women', page 65.

Hecabe

Book 6, 251–311; Book 22, 79–91, 405–436; Book 24, 200–298, 746–759.

She has epithets of 'gentle' and 'generous', and is the mother both to her son Hector, to whom she tries to give wine as he comes in from the battle, and to the city, which Hector asks her to protect by offering her best robe to Athene. She offers the most richly decorated robe – one which Paris had brought back with Helen. Athene does not accept it. In Book 22, Hecabe joins with Priam in trying to persuade Hector not to fight Achilles in single combat, and in Book 24 she similarly begs Priam not to risk his life by going to the Greek camp.

Study question
How does Homer use the character of Hecabe to increase tension in Book 6, and at Priam's departure in Book 24?

S & C Read Euripides' *Hecabe* to see the effects of extreme grief on her when she has lost everything.

She is portrayed sympathetically as she displays her love for her son and grief at the fate of Troy.

However, perhaps we should ask why she suggests a libation to Zeus before Hector has cleansed himself, and why she chooses a dress taken from Helen as an offering to Athene. She is portrayed as the caring wife and mother, but Helen includes her in the people in the palace who insulted her (Book 24, 770).

Hector

Book 3, 38–120; Book 6, 77–118, 237–529; Book 16, 530–867; Book 17; Book 18, 175–179, 249–314; Book 22; Book 24, 719–804.

In Book 3, he berates Paris for his unheroic ways, accusing his brother of having good looks, but no strength or courage. He is clearly perceived by the Greeks as the most threatening Trojan enemy: as he steps out to propose the truce, the Greeks make him their target for their arrows and stones.

From line 242, Book 6 focuses on Hector. His brother Helenus tells him to rally his troops and then visit his mother and ask her to make an offering to Athene. Is it significant that his brother gives him instructions? Does this suggest that the leader of the Trojans needs somebody to make decisions for him? When Hector arrives at the Scaean Gate, he is besieged by women asking about their sons, brothers and husbands, and when he arrives at the palace, we see him with his own mother, sister-in-law and wife. We see how much the women rely on him for their protection, and the tensions between his responsibilities as a family man, and the hero's desire for *kleos*. As Helen puts it, 'No one in Troy bears a greater burden of responsibility for the fighting than you.'

Study question
To what extent does the picture you have of Hector match the profile of a hero discussed on pp. 25–31?

Andromache begs him not to risk his life in battle, telling him, 'This determination of yours will be the death of you.' He does not reject what she says, but sympathises, explaining, 'I too have all this constantly on my mind.' But he is determined to win glory for his father and himself: in the conflict between family and fighting for glory, the latter will win.

In Book 16, fear of disgrace motivates him. After the death of Sarpedon, Glaucus berates him: 'Think of the shame of it . . . if [the Greeks] should take Sarpedon's arms and desecrate his body.' Hector fights, but Zeus decides that he should be driven back towards the town by Patroclus. Zeus thus 'made a coward of Hector'. When Hector gets to the gates, he is in two minds about what to do, and Apollo intervenes, asking him, 'Hector why have you stopped fighting and neglected your duty? . . . Off with you now.' Hector goes on to kill Patroclus.

EXPLORE FURTHER
For more on Hector, read B. Graziosi, *Homer* (OUP, 2016); see Chapter 7, 'The Tragedy of Hector'.

The gods push him in different directions – Zeus back to Troy, Apollo away to kill Patroclus – just as he is in conflict in his own mind as to whether he should retreat or fight.

In Books 17, 18 and 22, we see him reacting to others, divine and mortal.

Paris (Alexandros)

Book 3; Book 6, 279–285, 312–341.

Paris is the cause of the war and has little respect from his fellow Trojans or from Helen. In Book 3 his brother Hector calls him a 'woman-crazed seducer', a 'creature of loathing' and refers to his lyre-playing, his long hair, handsome looks and dedication to

Study question
Find the physical descriptions of Paris. What do they tell you?

the gifts of Aphrodite. Paris does, however, have the courage to fight Menelaus in single combat.

ACTIVITY

Examine the influences on Hector in Books 17, 18 and 22.
Is he weak and indecisive, or a hero trying to do his best under difficult circumstances?

Reference	Person	Nature of intervention	Consequence for Hector
Book 17, 73	Apollo as Mentes		
Book 17, 140	Glaucus		
Book 17, 200	Zeus		
Book 17, 322	Apollo as Periphas		
Book 17, 582	Apollo as Phaenops		
Book 18, 250	Polydamus		
Book 18, 310	Athene		
Book 22, 170–187	Zeus and Athene		
Book 22, 215	Apollo		
Book 22, 216–330	Athene		

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'Perhaps the main difference between the two heroes is that Hector is represented as quintessentially social and human, while Achilles is inhumanly isolated and daemonic in his greatness.'

(Seth L. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (University of California Press, 1984)

What evidence can you find to support Schein's statement?

Priam

Book 3, 146–313; Book 22, 25–78; Book 24.
Priam is presented in Book 3 as a modest and kind man who talks with affection to Helen. He leaves the walls because he cannot bear to watch Paris being killed in single combat, and later in Book 22 he begs Hector not to go out to face Achilles. He is respected for his age: 'Young men are never dependable, but when an old man takes a hand in such affairs, he considers the future as well as the past,' observes Menelaus, preferring to get

ACTIVITY

Study Book 24, 169–697 in detail. Then, basing your answer on the material in the text, write an account of the events from Priam's point of view.

Study questions

1. Is Priam a flawed leader? To what extent is he responsible for the war?
2. Why do you think Homer includes the scene with Hecabe and the sons of Priam in the portico in Book 24?

Priam, not Hector, to take the oath. Priam's age makes him vulnerable. In Book 24 his age and vulnerability, together with his courage, are emphasised as he goes through the Greek camp, and these are the qualities which inspire Achilles to treat him with humanity.

It could also be said of Priam, however, that he bears responsibility for what happens. Hector declares that in the single combat, the one who wins should 'take all the property and the woman' (Book 3, 92). Later, Priam makes the truce on behalf of the Trojans and calls on Zeus to punish anyone who might break the truce: 'May the brains of whichever party breaks this treaty be poured out on the ground as that wine is poured, and not only theirs but their children's too; and other men possess their wives' (Book 3, 300–302). Menelaus is clearly the winner of the combat and it is, of course, Pandarus, a Trojan, who breaks the truce. Priam does nothing to honour his promises.

Helen

Book 3, 121–244; Book 6, 323–362; Book 24, 760–776.

When we meet Helen, she is working at the loom, weaving scenes of conflict. She is interrupted by Iris, messenger of the immortals, who instils in her a yearning for her husband Menelaus. Helen goes to the walls to watch the troops. The old men say she looks like a goddess, and Priam calls her 'dear child'. They seem less resentful of her than they are of Paris. When she returns to her rooms, Aphrodite herself is there to manipulate and threaten her into going to Paris, and Helen laments her misery. She continues to lament her situation to Hector in Book 6, describing herself as a 'horrible creature', and wishing she had died at birth, and again when she grieves for Hector in Book 24.

FIGURE 13
Helen is pointing to her necklace – a firebrand which represents Paris. Behind her, Troy is burning in this 1863 painting by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

Study questions

1. What might Helen be thinking in Figure 13?
2. Does this depiction reflect the view you have of her from the *Iliad*?

CLASSICAL LEGACY

Helen has remained a fascinating figure since Homeric times. Homer portrays her as sorrowful. In Aeschylus' *Oresteia* she is 'Helen, whore of Sparta'. In Euripides' *Helen*, she spends the war in Egypt, not Troy. She is sometimes raped, sometimes seduced, sometimes seducer. Christopher Marlowe's description of the 'face that launched a thousand ships' in Dr Faustus in 1604 celebrates her beauty. In Margaret Atwood's *Helen of Troy does Countertop Dancing* (1996), we have one of many twentieth-century reinventions of her.

Research other appearances of Helen in modern culture.

Study questions

1 Is Helen too full of self-pity to be convincing?
2 Is she an innocent victim of Aphrodite?

Note: An examination of the workings of the gods in the *Iliad* would probably lead us to conclude that gods force people into doing things that may be in their nature anyway.

ACTIVITY

Make a graffiti wall. Forget for the moment that there is no evidence of Trojans and Greeks writing in the *Iliad* (apart from Book 6, 167–170).

Divide the class into Greeks and Trojans, and feel free to write on the wall any comments about the other side. You should be able to justify all your comments from the text.

Keep adding to it, and by the end of the year, your wall will be a good revision tool.

THE PORTRAYAL OF WAR

The question of how far real military tactics are represented in the *Iliad* is still debated. The motivation and achievements of individual heroes are certainly important. Achilles has no real interest in Helen and Menelaus. He has joined the war in order to justify his heroic status. Sarpedon has commitment to Priam, but is not concerned with Helen. Even the Trojans show little dedication to what they are supposedly protecting – Paris and Helen. The elders acknowledge her beauty, but that is hardly a good enough reason to engage in a ten-year war.

Some heroes are particularly bloodthirsty: Agamemnon, for example, delights in plunging his sword into Adrestus, who otherwise might have been spared by his 'soft-hearted' brother Menelaus.

S & C

Allan considers that interpreting the poem as a pacifist work is misleading. 'For the poem delights in and celebrates battlefield prowess even as it foregrounds the miseries and losses of war. Homer presents the complexity of war, not a one-dimensional and lazy critique of it' (William Allan, *Homer: The Iliad*, Bloomsbury, 2012).

In what ways could Homer be said to present the 'complexity' of war?

S & C Simone Weil, the French philosopher, wrote the essay *The Iliad* or the *Poem of Force* during the Second World War. It is a study of the dehumanising effects of war, in which the nature of heroism is questioned. Scholars debate as to whether it displays a deep understanding of Homer or is more a product of her living in wartime France.

Read the essay and see what you think.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'The Achaeans' (Greeks') martial pre-eminence reminds us that to fully understand the *Iliad* we must balance the suffering caused by war against the glory that comes from success in it.'

(William Allan, *Homer: The Iliad*, Bloomsbury, 2012)

What is your lasting impression of the *Iliad,* glory or suffering?

As we have seen (p. 18), there is a formula for recounting deaths on the battlefield.

Homer sometimes recounts not only the death of the victim, but the sorrow that the death will bring to his loved ones. The pictures he gives, full of the pathos of parents burying young sons, have led some to see the *Iliad* as an anti-war poem.

The encounter between Glaucus and Diomedes draws attention to the social obligations against which wars are fought. It is only as they are preparing to kill each other that the heroes recognise their shared bonds of *xenia*.

Balancing the male world of killing is the female world, and the terrible cruelty that war inflicts on women and families.

The women captured in the war represent the future of the women of Troy. They are given as rewards or sold to the Greek warriors to serve them in their beds.

FIGURE 14
Andromache's worst fears will be realised, and Astyanax will be hurled from the walls of Troy. The emotional subject-matter appealed to fourth-century vase-painters.

At the time of the *Iliad*, Andromache is still free, but she will soon join Briseis as a war prize sent into slavery and traded like a beast. Both Briseis and Andromache have already seen their families wiped out by Achilles.

The women of Troy make desperate offerings to Athene, but she is pitiless, and they can only wait for the Greeks to kill their menfolk and reduce them to slaves and concubines.

The shield which Hephaestus makes for Achilles shows the celestial bodies – the sea, earth, sky, sun, moon and stars – in the centre, and the ocean round the edge, reflecting the whole universe. There are also scenes of ploughing and harvesting, dancing and singing, and flocks of sheep. However, the peace is not total, as two lions are attacking a bull, and there are two cities, one of which is at war. Is Homer making a comment on the inevitability of war? Does the city represent Troy?

FIGURE 15
The theme of war and the suffering it means for the women is still relevant. This picture shows an all-female production of Euripides' *Trojan Women* at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, directed by Sarah McCormack in 2011.

ACTIVITY CW

Using the drawing of the shield on the Companion Website as a guide, fill in the details of the scenes shown on it as described in Book 18, 478–616.

S & C

Read Euripides' *Trojan Women* for a version of the story produced in 415 BC. He also wrote *Andromache* and *Hecabe*, examining the impact of the Trojan War on women.

His *Helen*, however, is more light-hearted and gives us an alternative story of Helen.

James Morwood's *The Plays of Euripides* (BCP, 2002) gives a good introduction to the plays, but it is best to go to a production if you can.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Consult Mark W. Edwards, *Homer: Poet of the Iliad* (The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 278–285, for a full commentary on the shield.

DEATH AND MORTALITY

The heroes are aware of their mortality. Glaucus says of families, 'one generation grows, the other fades' (Book 6, 149). They seem to accept that the time of their death is already set. They talk readily about having their span of life on earth until Zeus pronounces their death.

Hector explains, 'I can't tell whether . . . the gods have destined me to fall to the Greeks this very day' (Book 6, 368), before making the choice to leave his home inside Troy and move outside the walls to fight. 'Death itself, I think, is something no man, coward or hero, can escape, once he has come into this world' (Book 6, 488) are his parting words to Andromache.

Achilles, who knows that he will die young, is particularly aware of his mortality. He says to Thetis, 'You a goddess bore me to live the briefest of lives' (Book 1, 352), and she says of him, 'He is already singled out for an early death' (Book 1, 505). The brevity of his life makes his attainment of *timē* and *kleos* all the more urgent, since he has less time to acquire them. The time the heroes are on earth is therefore more precious, and the pressure for them to achieve heroic glory is greater.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read Book 11, 465–562 of the *Odyssey* to hear what the Achilles in that epic thinks about life and death.

In Book 9, however, Achilles perhaps questions his decision to live a short heroic life, saying, 'for nothing, as I now see it, equals the value of life' (Book 9, 401).

Death is final. There is no indication of the existence of a happy afterlife, such as we see in the Elysian Fields in Virgil's *Aeneid*. The time of death is set at birth. 'As for my death, I will welcome it when Zeus and the other immortal gods wish it to be,' says Achilles (Book 22, 365). When death comes, it often creeps over like a mist and there are no rewards to look forward to in any kind of heavenly existence.

For the hero, death has a special significance, since it represents the opportunity for *kleos*, for dying with such glory that men will talk about it afterwards. If a hero's death is put into song, he becomes immortal through the continuing tale of his exploits.

This explains why in the *Iliad*, the heroes are always concerned to have a death in which they play a leading role, and which will feature their strength, fighting skill and fine weaponry, and sometimes also their fine rhetorical skills – skill with words was a heroic quality. There is always an audience to witness the death of a hero, for how else could it become the stuff of epic?

ACTIVITY

Go through the passages that relate the deaths of Sarpedon (Book 16, 462–507), Patroclus (Book 16, 789–867) and Hector (Book 22, 250–384). List all the key points that indicate they are dying a hero's death.

Homer tells us nothing about the slaughter of ordinary soldiers; we have only the deaths of heroes which, gruesome as they are, are usually achieved by one or two blows which bring death almost immediately. Heroes are not subjected to incapacitating pain or lingering death throes. They leave the earth physically intact (apart from the opposing hero's sword through the vital organs, of course), their beauty unimpaired, and articulate to the moment they die.

The imagery surrounding death does much to make us see the underlying ferocity in all this killing. The similes reflect predator and prey, and our sympathy is drawn to the vulnerable prey. But should we rejoice in the victory of the brave and strong over the inferior instead? Either way, the overall effect is to portray human beings as subject to the bloody laws of survival in the way of a lion and lamb, or an eagle and hare.

The deaths of lesser warriors are often more moving, because Homer gives glimpses of the lives that have been destroyed through the death. We anticipate the effect the death will have on parents, and are made aware of the horror experienced by parents who have to bury their own sons.

The intensity of the grief that war causes is shown particularly through the women. Women were, and still are in some cultures, those who lay out the body and mourn, and so their association with death is physically close. When we see them in the *Iliad* they are (except for Helen) either concerned with the past deaths of their menfolk, or preparing to cope with future deaths.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Look at how Homer conveys the cruelty of death in the cases of Simoisius (Book 4, 473–489), Euphorbus (Book 17, 43–60) and Hippothous (Book 17, 288–303).

The physicality of the dead body is portrayed throughout the epic. The first lines of the poem present the image of heroes' bodies being 'prey to dogs and the birds' feasting'. The fear of being left unburied is a concern of warriors about to die. The cruellest taunt that a victor can make to the dying hero is that his body will be left to the vultures. Aphrodite preserves Hector's body with ambrosia and oil of roses, and Apollo keeps the sun from decaying it. Thetis preserves Patroclus' body with ambrosia.

Achilles' decision to hold a funeral marks an acceptance of Patroclus' death, and the return of Hector's body marks the climax of the *Iliad*.

FIGURE 17
These Kashmiri women suffer the same grief nearly 3,000 years after Homer.

MENIS (WRATH OR ANGER)

menis – all-consuming anger, usually associated with the devastating anger of the gods

Homer asks the muse to sing of the wrath of Achilles. ***Menis***, or wrath, is the first word in the epic and will colour the whole poem.

Menis is not just ordinary anger, but the sort of anger displayed by a god, an anger which has no limits. Its effects can be devastating. The gods, for the ancients, were not figures of kindness or morality, but of power, and so the word *menis* is chosen to strike fear in the audience. This wrath is not that of a god, however, but of Achilles, a man.

This attribution of what seems like divine power to a man is crucial. It communicates Achilles' strong association with the gods (his mother, Thetis, is an immortal), and for a man to wield divine wrath is dangerous: he is acting outside his sphere, and in the realm of huge forces that could detract from his own humanity. The introductory lines tell us as much – that his wrath will be the reason for great anguish, with the bodies of Greeks becoming prey to dogs and vultures.

The anger, we are told, originates from a quarrel between the son of Atreus, king of men, and god-like Achilles. What Achilles has got to balance, during the course of the poem, is his uncompromising rage, the stuff of gods, and his own humanity.

The quarrel had arisen because the callous and arrogant Agamemnon, by insulting a priest of Apollo, had drawn down the wrath of the god on the Greeks. They suffered nine days of plague, and Agamemnon returned the priest's daughter to him in order to put an end to Apollo's anger.

Now he is claiming Briseis, Achilles' prize, in compensation. Agamemnon appears an unpleasant bully, and his demand to take Achilles' girl is not just about taking a slave, it is attacking Achilles' very status as a hero, as it is removing from him his *timē*, or public honour (see p. 30).

Achilles has come to Troy to fight with the Greeks not because of any loyalty to Menelaus, but to gain the glory that will make him a hero. Without his glory he has no reason to be there and no reason to fight. He could leave, but such are his qualities as a man that he will not give in to an arrogant and inferior leader, and in his rage, he calls upon divine help to punish Agamemnon and the Greeks.

The help is granted by Zeus, unleashing death and destruction. This will lead eventually to the slaughter of Achilles' beloved Patroclus, not an outcome that he, as mortal, had foreseen.

When Patroclus is killed, Achilles knows that he must return to the battleground to avenge his friend. The argument about Briseis pales into insignificance, and he shows little interest in her return or Agamemnon's gifts.

In Book 19, Homer shows in detail a reconciliation scene in respect of Agamemnon, but also a picture of Achilles' withdrawal from normal human activities as a new wave of anger takes hold of him.

Odysseus, perceptive as always, sees what is happening, and gets Achilles to accept the gifts and then enjoy a 'rich feast' with Agamemnon in his hut. A meal is almost a ritual among heroes, and is an outward reflection of harmony and civilisation. Achilles refuses to eat and says dismissively, 'So what you speak of is of no interest to my heart, but my thought is on blood and slaughter and the groans of men in pain.' Phoenix tries to comfort him, but 'his heart could feel no comfort until he entered the jaws of bloody battle'. Even Zeus notices, and sends Athene to give him a transfusion of nectar and ambrosia.

This new anger that is consuming him, his rage at Hector for killing Patroclus, will lead him not only to kill the Trojan hero, but also to carry out acts which are not worthy of a man, let alone a hero.

He acts with no humanity as he taunts the dying Hector with, 'Now the dogs and birds will maul you hideously', as he drags Hector's body behind his chariot and, in an act of what seems to us unspeakable savagery, slaughters twelve young Trojans on the funeral pyre of Patroclus.

Study questions

1. Read Books 1 and 9. Compare the positions taken by Achilles and Agamemnon in these two books.
2. Who is morally right?
3. Whose anger is justified?

ACTIVITY

Work through the first book of the *Iliad* and, using the following table as a template, note down in chronological order:

- all the instances of anger
- how they are resolved
- what the consequences are.

Reference	Character	Cause of anger	Severity (1–10)	Consequences
Book 1, 8–67	Apollo	Treatment of Chrysus, his priest, by Agamemnon	9/10	Plague

RECONCILIATION

reconciliation – an acknowledgement of events or behaviour resulting in a resolution and restoration of a more balanced situation

There are several **reconciliation** scenes in the *Iliad*.

In Book 19, Achilles is the first person to address the quarrel with Agamemnon and thereby to begin the reconciliation. He does not discuss the argument, nor does he try to apportion any blame; he expresses a wish that it had never happened. The blame for it is almost irrelevant, given the horrendous consequences – the death of Patroclus – which now dominate his being. 'It is now over and done with: let it go,' he announces, and goes on, 'I now renounce my anger. There is no need for me to nurse it any longer' (Book 19, 67). This is a rational and mature response, but the irony is that Achilles is now being consumed again by anger, this time against Hector, and again his anger will have consequences for his behaviour, his humanity and his heroic status.

Agamemnon replies, keen to justify himself (though Achilles had not accused him), and arguing at length that Zeus was responsible. 'But since I was blinded and Zeus took away my wits, I am ready to take it back and offer the appeasement of limitless reparation,' he finally concedes. Briseis is returned as promised, but one can hardly say that Agamemnon has acted with any grace or humility. It is left to Odysseus to try to bring about the final reconciliation over a feast.

In Book 23, Achilles is reconciled to his own imminent death. He has, in cutting off a lock of his hair for Patroclus' funeral, acknowledged that he will not be returning home, and will never see his father again. In burying Patroclus it is as though he has given himself the funeral rites. The games show a return to concern for his men, and the beginnings of the acceptance of Patroclus' death.

In Book 24 when he sees Priam, and realises that the old man wants nothing more than to bury his son, Achilles becomes reconciled to what it is to be a man, and to the notion that the bond between the father and son is more important than the lust for revenge. The care he then shows over Hector's body, the meal they share, his concern for Priam's safety and his agreement to a truce to permit the burial, all demonstrate his compassion.

He is touchy when Priam seems impatient, and there is no talk of ending the fighting – reconciliation does not go that far. But our last sight is of Achilles, having eaten, sleeping in his hut with Briseis beside him. There is some return to civilised behaviour.

TOPIC REVIEW

1. What qualities and values might you expect to find in a Homeric hero?
2. What was life like in Troy?
3. How does Homer portray the major and minor characters?
4. How does an awareness of their mortality impact on the behaviour of the heroes?
5. What is the impact of Achilles' *menis* on himself, the other characters and the events of the story?
6. To what extent does Achilles change by the end of Book 24?

Further Reading

Peter Jones, *Homer's Iliad: A Companion to Three Translations* (BCP, 2003)
E.T. Owen, *The Story of the Iliad* (Bristol Classical Press, 1994)
A. Nicholson, *The Mighty Dead: Why Homer Matters* (William Collins, 2015)
Seth L. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (University of California Press, 1984)
Michael Silk, *Homer: The Iliad (Landmarks of World Literature)* (CUP, 1987)
Simone Weil, *The Iliad* or the *Poem of Force* (various editions, 1939)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

AS Level

Passage A: *Iliad* Book 22, 93–110

Like a snake in the hills, full of venom due to the toxic herbs it eats, that glares balefully and writhes inside its hole, waiting as some man approaches, so Hector held his ground, filled with latent power, his bright shield resting on a jutting outwork. But his proud thoughts were troubled: 'Alas, if I retreat through the gate, to the safety of the wall, Polydamus will not be slow to reproach me, since he advised me to withdraw our forces to the city, on that fatal night when Achilles re-appeared. I refused, though it may have been better! Now, in my folly, having brought us to the brink of ruin, I'd be ashamed to hear some insignificant Trojan, or his long-robed wife, say: 'Hector has brought ruin on the army, trusting too much in his own right arm.' If that's what they'll say, then I'd be better by far to meet Achilles face to face and kill him before returning to the city, or die gloriously beneath its walls.

Trans: A. S. Kline

1. How does Homer's use of language make the portrayal of Hector especially vivid? Make four points and support each with a reference to the passage. [8]
2. To what extent did Hector bring about his own death? Use this passage as a starting point, and justify your response. [16]

A Level

Passage B: *Iliad* Book 18, 114–137

So I will go now and find Hector, the man who killed my dearest friend, and accept death whenever Zeus and the other gods decide that I must die. Not even great Heracles escaped his doom, dear as he was to Zeus, the son of Cronos, Hera's dread anger fated to overcome him. I too, if a like fate has been spun for me, will lie quiet when I am dead. But for now, let me win fame and glory too, and make many a deep-breasted Trojan woman moan without cease, wiping the tears from her tender cheeks with both her hands, to teach her how long I have been absent from the war. Though you love me, don't try to keep me from battle, I will never be persuaded.'

'What you say is right, my son,' silver-footed Thetis replied, 'it is right to save your hard-pressed friends from utter ruin. But the Trojans have your lovely armour, your shining bronze. Hector of the gleaming helm wears it and exults. Though not for long, I say, since his own death is upon him. So refrain from battle, until you see me here again. I will return tomorrow with the sun, and bring you glorious armour from Lord Hephaestus.'

Trans: A. S. Kline

1. Explain how Homer creates a heroic picture of Achilles in this passage. Use references to the passage to support your answer. [10]
2. How important are his parents to Achilles in the *Iliad*? Use this passage as a starting point, and justify your response. [20]

1.3 Social, Cultural and Religious Context

TOPIC OVERVIEW

- power of fate
- role of the immortals and relationship between immortals and mortals
- family and friendship
- hospitality and guest friendship (*xenia*)
- relationships between men and women, parents and children
- part played by women in the epic and their position in society
- role of slaves

The following prescribed sources are covered in this topic:

- Homer, *Iliad*, Books 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24

Remember that you will be given credit in the exam if you study extra sources and make relevant use of them in your answers.

This section examines the role of **fate** and the gods in the events, and relationships between mortals and immortals. It looks also at the nature of the different groups in the epic, the relationships between them and the social obligations by which they live.

fate – what will happen, as determined by a supernatural power, and overseen by Zeus

THE POWER OF FATE

Fate in the *Iliad* often refers to the time at which a man is going to die. It can also be said to predetermine certain events such as the fall of Troy (not, Apollo tells Patroclus, by his hand, or even that of Achilles).

Zeus seems to be responsible for ensuring that fated events happen, yet he toys with the idea of saving his son Sarpedon. 'What are you suggesting now? Are you proposing to reprieve from the pains of death a mortal man whose destiny has long been settled?' says an outraged Hera (Book 16, 440–443). To change fate would upset the whole balance of things, so Zeus lets his son die.

Both Patroclus and Hector are going to die, and that is fated. However, the heroes contribute to their fate. Patroclus 'was completely deluded, the blind fool. Had he kept

to his orders from Achilles, he would have saved himself from the evil destiny which is dark death. But the will of Zeus always prevails over men' (Book 16, 686–688). Of Hector, Zeus says, 'Unhappy man! Little knowing how close you are to death, you are putting on the imperishable armour of a mighty man of war, before whom all others tremble . . . Well, for the moment at any rate, I grant you supremacy. But you must pay for it. There will be no homecoming for you from battle . . .' (Book 17, 201–208).

Agamemnon talks of fate making him take Briseis from Achilles, but this sounds like a lame excuse and an attempt to shift responsibility.

The power of fate in the *Iliad* is felt in the emotional impact it has. The lamenting Hecabe says of Hector in Book 24: 'Fate must have spun for him with her thread as he was born, at the moment I gave birth to him, that he should be food for the quick-running dogs, away from his parents . . .'

Thetis knows the fate of Achilles and this turns the story of a warrior's death into tragedy. Achilles has made the choice to die in Troy (he seems to have had a choice in the time of his death), and throughout the *Iliad* we are never allowed to forget that decision. The focus is the inevitability not of an external destiny beyond his control, but of the consequences of his decision. The fact that Achilles himself is aware of what is bound to happen earns him respect from the audience. Unlike the other warriors who hope to survive the battle, Achilles knows that he will die young, and he embraces his destiny. Even Xanthus, Achilles' horse, tells him about the 'inexorable destiny' of his death (Book 19, 407–418).

We see the impact of fate in Thetis. She loves her mortal child; in Book 18, 'with a piercing cry she he took her son's head in her hands, and lamenting spoke winged words: "My child, why these tears?"' His response, 'I have no wish to live and linger in the world of men', is devastating. She resigns herself: 'If that is so, my child, you do not have long to live.'

The scene has all the pathos of a mother admitting that her child has a terminal illness, and acknowledging that she is powerless to prevent his death. That she has been instrumental in hastening it by asking Zeus to bring victories to the Trojans adds to her desperate situation. The fact that Thetis, as an immortal, cannot die makes it all the more unbearable: she will never escape the agony of having seen her son die.

FIGURE 18
When Apollo knows that it is Hector's fate to die, he leaves him to be killed by Achilles. Here he is striding away.

The Olympians – Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Athene, Artemis, Apollo, Demeter, Aphrodite, Ares, Hermes, Hephaestus and Hestia (and Dionysus is also usually included)

anthropomorphic – in human form

THE ROLE OF THE IMMORTALS AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMMORTALS AND MORTALS

The twelve main gods, **the Olympians**, reside on Mount Olympus, where they consume ambrosia and nectar, and enjoy the sacrifices made to them. They are **anthropomorphic**, and take an interest in human affairs, supporting their favourites by intervening in events.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Peter Jones says in *Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on Three Translations* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2003) that 'to understand them, we must divorce ourselves from theology, which attempts to present a systematic, coherent and self-consistent exposition of the nature of god, together with creeds and dogmas . . . For the ancients the world was full of gods who are best thought of as blind forces, like gravity. Belief and dogma are irrelevant to gravity: all one has to do is acknowledge its power when one is on cliff-edges.'

This quote poses an interesting question: if the gods were simply like gravity, why make sacrifices to appease them?

The role of the immortals

Study question
Which gods support which mortals? Make a list for reference, dividing it into Greek and Trojan camps.

The Olympians who play a part in the *Iliad* are Aphrodite, Apollo, Athene, Hephaestus, Hera, Hermes and Zeus. (Poseidon is not active in the books set for study.)

Achilles' mother Thetis, an immortal nymph, is a crucial link between Achilles and the powerful gods of Olympus, and Iris is used as a messenger.

Individual gods support particular individual mortals or causes.

The immortals intervene in the action

Since they have power over humans, the gods can take the story anywhere Homer chooses. How to remove Paris from the duel before he gets killed? Easy! Get Aphrodite to whisk him away, before he or anyone else knows what is happening!

ACTIVITY CW

This list of divine interventions deliberately leaves out the details. It reminds us of just how often they act to support the one or the other side. (A longer list of examples is on the Companion Website.)

Work through it and give as much information as you can about each intervention.

- Apollo sends a plague to the Greeks.
- Iris takes news to Helen and puts thoughts into her head.
- Aphrodite breaks Paris' helmet strap.
- Athene breathes strength into Diomedes and gives him a warning.
- Apollo removes Patroclus' armour.
- Thetis visits Olympus.
- Iris visits Achilles.
- Hermes helps Priam.

Study question
Look at the interventions of the gods. Which ones are involved with mental processes rather than physical action?

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Peter Jones is clear that when a god intervenes, it is not simply Homer's way of describing a mental process, as if the gods were not affecting human actions, but merely reflecting them. 'Homer is perfectly capable of showing people making up their own minds without divine intervention,' he states (*Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on Three Translations*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2003). Others, however, are less literal in their interpretation, believing that when Homer wants to describe a person acting on impulse or getting a sudden, inexplicable idea, he attributes the action to a god rather than explain the human psychology. As Michael Silk puts it, 'Though consistently and coherently represented as external beings, they constitute forces which . . . we may take as equally internal' (*Homer: The Iliad (Landmarks of World Literature)* (CUP, 1987)).

To what extent does the portrayal of the gods as sources of inspiration enhance the storytelling?

The interventions of the gods give the Iliad much dramatic interest

The gods change the course of the action in very specific ways at moments of tension. Athene persuades Hector to leave the walls and expose himself to the fatal wrath of Achilles, for example. They can also provide an effect which colours the whole scene. When Athene wraps the **aegis** round Achilles' shoulders, puts a golden cloud round him and makes a flame burn from his head, the Trojans quake and chariots overturn. Here, we have pure big-screen dramatics. Homer would have been very much at home in Hollywood!

aegis – a sort of cape or shawl which is shaken by a god (usually Zeus or Athene), and panics the enemy or protects favourites

The gods' relationship with mortals

The gods display human characteristics – including jealousy, selfishness and rage, and are motivated by some of the same considerations as the mortal heroes. Their honour (*timē*) is very important to them, and a god who feels insulted will seek vengeance. Hera and Athene still bear a grudge against Paris for his decision in the golden apple contest, and their price is the destruction of Troy. Apollo's punishment for Agamemnon's insult to his priest is far worse than the crime – a case of divine anger, not justice. When Helen seems to resist Aphrodite, the goddess threatens her: 'Wilful girl. I might bring about a fatal hatred of you on both sides.' A mortal, naturally, is powerless when faced with the anger of a god.

It is not surprising, therefore, that humans live in fear of the gods, and much of the emphasis of the worship is on trying to secure the gods' support, and to ensure that they have no reason to use their divine wrath.

Mortals communicate with gods through prayers and oaths, and these are accompanied by libations and sacrifices in order keep the gods sweet. The relationship is contractual by nature: the mortals use their sacrificial offerings as bargaining tools. A good example of this is in Book 1, when Chryses reminds Apollo that he has earned support from the

god. 'If ever I built a temple that pleased you, if ever I burnt you offerings of the fat thighs of bulls or goats, grant me this wish' (Book 1, 40).

The immortals communicate with signs, usually from the sky, to affirm their consent or disapproval. In Book 24, Priam asks Zeus for a bird of omen, and Zeus 'instantly sent out an eagle, the most perfect of prophetic birds'. They frequently come to earth, but usually disguised as a human. 'It would be reprehensible for mortals to entertain an immortal god face to face,' says Hermes (Book 24, 463).

The picture we get of the immortals on Olympus is one of self-indulgence. However, we do see divine pity, particularly at the end, when Apollo complains, 'You are hard-hearted, you gods – monsters of cruelty.' He goes on to point out that Hector's family are

ACTIVITY

Study these examples to get a picture of the important rituals associated with sacrifice.

1, 35–42	Chryses reminds Apollo of all the offerings he has made
1, 233–244	Achilles swears he will withdraw from the fighting
1, 312–317	Purification and sacrifice to Apollo
1, 442–474	The Greeks make an offering to Apollo
3, 103–110	The truce
3, 264–301	Oath to Zeus
4, 100–121	Athene tells Pandarus to promise an offering to Apollo before he shoots Menelaus
6, 86–101, 239–312	Hecabe's prayer to Athene
9, 174–178	Libation to Zeus
9, 205–220	Offerings to the gods at the meal
9, 656–57	Libation
10, 570–579	Odysseus puts Dolon's bloodstained equipment in the stern of his ship, until they can prepare their sacrifice to Athene
16, 220–256	Libation to Zeus
16, 514–531	Glaucus prays to Apollo
19, 171–183, 249–265	Agamemnon's oath
24, 287–321	Libation to Zeus

Study question
In the 2004 film *Troy*, the story was told without the gods. To what extent would your enjoyment of the *Iliad* be spoilt if the gods were removed?

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

As Silk puts it:

> 'At the start the heroes quarrel on earth; at the end of 1, the gods quarrel on Olympus. In essence both quarrels are about *timē*, honour: Achilles feels himself dishonoured by Agamemnon, as Hera does by Zeus' promise to Thetis. But the parallel at once becomes a contrast. The heroes' quarrel is set to bring death and destruction; the gods', by comparison, is aimless and even frivolous. On earth no reconciliation is possible until most of the damage has been done. In heaven the lame god Hephaestus is able to divert Hera's rage with a cautionary tale against himself and a display of his disability.'
>
> (Michael Silk, *Homer: The Iliad (Landmarks of World Literature)* (CUP, 1987), p. 79)

To what extent do you think the gods come over as frivolous?

FIGURE 19
Compare the scene on this fifth-century Athenian vase with the description of the sacrifice to Apollo in the *Iliad* Book 1, 458–471.

being prevented from carrying out the funeral rites, while Achilles, 'who has no decent feelings in him', has destroyed pity and has no respect for others. Zeus listens and sends Thetis to express his displeasure to Achilles and set in motion the reconciliation with Priam.

Zeus

Book 1, 175, 353, 395, 494–611; Book 3, 298–369; Book 4, 1–72, 160–68; Book 6, 251–68; Book 9, 116–118, 225–239, 357; Book 16, 118–123, 221–256, 431–461, 566–568, 644–675, 688–691; Book 17, 45–46, 198–209, 262–273, 326–341, 441–465, 543–552, 591–596, 640–650; Book 18, 328–332, 354–367; Book 19, 85–133, 221–24, 258–74, 340–48; Book 22, 168–87, 208–23; Book 24, 64–119, 287–333, 524–33.

Zeus is the most powerful god: at his arrival the other immortals rise, and his nod is enough to shake the heights of Olympus.

As the god who implements fate he is called upon frequently by the heroes, who recognise that he knows when they must die. 'I welcome death whenever Zeus wants,' says Achilles (22, 365). Hector (18, 116) and Priam (22, 60) express the same thought. Zeus is tempted to deliver his son Sarpedon from death, but does not, for that would upset the whole of Olympus.

Zeus perhaps has the power to change fate, and he does intervene at points in the action, but ultimately he follows fate. Sometimes we hear his thoughts when he witnesses the inevitable. When he sees Hector putting on Achilles' arms, he says to himself, 'Unhappy man! Little knowing how close you are to death . . . well for the moment at any rate I grant you supremacy. But you must pay for it.' He shows concern for the body

FIGURE 20
Poseidon, Apollo and Artemis from the fifth-century BC. Parthenon Frieze. They are seen here relaxing as they do in Book 1.

ACTIVITY

Re-read the scenes set on Olympus (Book 1, 531–611; Book 4, 1–72; Book 24, 22–119). Discuss the relationships between the gods, noting all the emotional undercurrents. Now act out the scenes, transposing the gods into the world of a modern soap opera.

S & C

Read Aphrodite's opening speech (lines 1–57), and Artemis' closing words (lines 1415–1439) in Euripides' *Hippolytus*, or Dionysus' speech lines at the beginning of the *Bacchae*. See how the gods react when they have been angered. Compare these gods of Greek tragedy with the gods in the *Iliad*.

of Patroclus and rouses the Greeks to defend it. When he sees Achilles closing in on Hector, he speaks out, 'This is an unhappy business! I have a warm place in my heart for this man . . . He has burnt the thighs of many oxen in my honour' (Book 22, 170).

Zeus' approval is important, and libations are poured to try to gain it. Hecabe, for example, suggests to Priam, 'Here, make a libation to father Zeus and pray for your safe return from the enemy's hands' (Book 24, 287).

Zeus is the god by whom heroes swear solemn oaths. When the Trojans have broken the truce, Agamemnon tells Menelaus, 'Olympian Zeus may postpone the penalty, but he exacts it, in full, in the end, and oath-breakers pay a heavy price – they pay with their own lives and their wives' and children's too' (Book 4, 160). He swears by Zeus when he is returning Briseis: 'I call on Zeus, highest and best of the gods, and then on the Earth and Sun and the Furies who punish men for perjury in the world below, to be my witnesses . . .' (Book 19, 258).

'Dreams are sent by Zeus,' says Achilles, and heralds are sacred to him. His power is well summed up by the image of the two jars (Book 24, 527): 'Zeus who delights in thunder has two jars standing on the floor of his palace in which he keeps his gifts, evils in one and blessings in the other. People who receive from him a mixture of the two enjoy varying fortunes, sometimes good and sometimes bad. But when Zeus serves a man from the jar of evil only, he debases him; ruinous hunger drives him over the bright earth and he goes his way respected by no-one, god or man.' Zeus can make havoc of the schemes of men (Book 18, 328), laments Achilles over the body of Patroclus.

Zeus is the supreme power on Olympus, but in his domestic setting displays some familiar human doubts and weaknesses. When Thetis is clinging to his knees in supplication, he is 'perturbed', fearing what his wife Hera will say: 'she heaps me with abuse . . . slanders

FIGURE 21
Ancient Greek coin showing the stern and inscrutable face of Zeus, *c.* 360 BC.

me constantly before the other gods' (Book 1, 520), he complains. As soon as he returns to his palace, Hera is ready to speak to him with cutting words. He asserts himself: 'Don't cross-examine me about it' (Book 1, 550). The conversation is more like family wrangling than a divine scene. In Book 1, Hephaestus manages to avert a large family row by diverting the anger and serving drinks. In Book 4, Hera and Athene mutter darkly to each other, determined to get their own way, whatever Zeus may think. In the end he concedes, allowing them to plan the destruction of Troy. He knows, however, that victory will not be swift for the Greeks, as he has already agreed to Thetis' request for the Trojans to drive the Greeks back to their ships. The justice of this, and the human suffering it will entail, are secondary considerations.

Aphrodite

Book 3, 369–446; Book 23, 184–87; Book 24, 22–30.

Aphrodite intervenes rarely in the prescribed books – she rescues Paris from the duel and preserves Hector's body. However, she could be held responsible for the war, since she had offered Paris the fatal bribe for the golden apple (Helen).She is responsible for giving Paris his 'fatal lust for women' and continues to manipulate Helen and Paris. When she feels challenged by Helen, she is swift to threaten punishment.

Apollo

Book 1, 7–100, 312–317, 431–468, 601–604; Book 4, 505–513; Book 10, 515–525; Book 16, 91–100, 513–529, 666–683, 698–730, 786–804; Book 17, 61–82, 118, 326–332, 582–590; Book 18, 453–456; Book 22, 6–20, 202–213; Book 23, 188–191, 381–389; Book 24, 18–54.

Apollo frames the *Iliad* and acts in parallel to Achilles in Book 1 and 24. In Book 1 his rage against Agamemnon causes him to descend from Olympus to deliver a plague to the Greeks, and in Book 24 he condemns the gods for their cruelty, and argues that Hector's body should be released.

As god of prophecy, he warns Patroclus that Troy is not destined to be captured by him or even Achilles (Book 16, 700–711). He knocks off Patroclus' helmet and undoes his armour, allowing Hector to strike the fatal blow. He supports the Trojans, and intervenes on their behalf, but deserts Hector when he knows that the time has come for him to die. (See Figure 18.)

EXAM TIP

If you are writing about the gods, remember not to judge them by modern standards. The gods of ancient Greece are not models of good behaviour, and they inspire in humans fear, not love.

Athene

Book 1, 188–222; Book 4, 20–140, 387–390, 514–516; Book 6, 86–98, 269–311; Book 10, 272–298, 506–514; Book 17, 543–573; Book 18, 203–231, 310–311; Book 22, 177–187, 214–277; Book 23, 388–400, 768–783; Book 24, 22–30.

Athene intervenes to support the Greeks, and by engineering the breaking of the truce, she too can be counted responsible for the fighting. Most memorably she lures Hector away from the walls to deliver him to Achilles and death.

Hephaestus

Book 1, 571–611; Book 18, 368–616.
Hephaestus' main function is to make the armour for Achilles.

Hera

Book 1, 518–611; Book 4, 1–69; Book 16, 439–461; Book 18, 356–366; Book 24, 22–76.
Hera joins with Athene in supporting the Greeks, but is probably most appreciated by the audience for her entertaining arguments with Zeus.

Study question
Who has the greater impact on the events of the *Iliad*, the male or female immortals?

Hermes

Book 24, 333–468, 677–697.
Hermes is sent by Zeus to accompany Priam on his journey through the Greek camp to Achilles' hut. He appears as a young man, and Priam adopts a paternal attitude towards him. 'My child, what an excellent thing it is to give the gods their proper offerings! I am thinking of my son,' he says to his guide (Book 24, 425–427). Hermes becomes a sort of substitute for Hector, just as Achilles will soon fall into the role of son.

Thetis

Book 1, 351–432, 493–531; Book 18, 35–148, 368–467; Book 19, 1–39; Book 24, 77–142.
Thetis is an immortal, but her portrayal as a loving mother separates her from the self-indulgent Olympians. Her role is to:

- be at the interchange between the mortal (Achilles) and immortal power (Zeus)
- initiate the action which will cause Achilles' death by her request to Zeus
- embody **dramatic irony** and **pathos**; she, like Hecabe and Andromache, is the mother/protector who cannot protect her son, but also the immortal who would rather die.

dramatic irony – a situation in which the full significance of the character's words or actions is known to the audience, but not to the character. This can create, for example, tension or pathos

pathos – an appeal to the emotions of the audience, stirring up feelings of sorrow and pity

Thetis is a sea-nymph, immortal, the wife of mortal Peleus and mother of Achilles. She is, therefore, between gods and humans, and the communication link between all-powerful Zeus and her mortal son.

She has in the past saved Zeus, Dionysus and Hephaestus. So in the divine world, where favours are not forgotten and debts have to be paid, she is granted her requests when she asks Zeus to prevent the Greeks from winning, and Hephaestus to provide Achilles with new armour. Although she saved three gods, she will not be able to save her son.

Just as Achilles hovers between his all-consuming desire to be a hero at whatever cost, and his humanity, so does Thetis have to manage the divine aspect of her nature and her love for her mortal son.

We first meet her in Book 1 when she responds to Achilles who is looking out to sea (his mother's domain), and complaining about the injustice of Agamemnon's action. She

FIGURE 22
Stories from the *Iliad* were a popular theme for Roman wall-paintings. This one from Pompeii shows Thetis and Hephaestus with the shield.

rises up out of the sea like a mist, but soon has the form of a real woman as she sits down by her weeping son and strokes him. She agrees to help him, but is too aware that in helping him to return to the fighting in Troy, she will be returning him to the place where he is destined to die. Her tearful response, 'Oh my child, what did I rear you for, after the pain of your birth . . . your fate is of short span, not at all long. But now you are both short-lived and miserable', expresses all the grief of a human being, powerless in the face of mortality, and a mother recognising that her much-loved son will die.

In a heartfelt lament to her fellow nymphs, she grieves that there is nothing she can do for her son: 'He is suffering, and I can give no help when I go to him.' She has certain powers of an immortal, but is powerless faced with Achilles' fate.

She acquires armour from Hephaestus and gives it to Achilles, gently coaxing him to leave Patroclus' body. She wants to make things better, as mothers do, and preserves the body of Patroclus with drops of divine ambrosia and red nectar.

Her final meeting with her son is at the request of the gods, who are using her to persuade Achilles to give up the body of Hector. Such is her distress at her impossible position that she says she feels shame to mix with the immortals.

The message she must give to Achilles is an important one, and relates to the first word of the *Iliad*, '*menis*' – the gods are angry at him because in his own anger he still has the body of Hector. She delivers Zeus' message, adding in maternal style a reminder that he should stop his excessive mourning, eat something and have sex. The advice is about more than just nourishment, for in having a meal with Priam, Achilles will re-enter the human world of civilisation and compassion.

Thetis is a tragic character: she obtains for her son the favour, but it is the granting of this favour which brings about the death of his beloved Patroclus. And the death of Patroclus is what causes Achilles to kill Hector, thus triggering his own death. The protector of Zeus cannot protect her own son. Her bigger tragedy is, perhaps, that she is immortal, and her grief for her son will be everlasting.

FAMILY AND FRIENDSHIP

Family

Society was not 'mobile' as it is today: many people would never have left their native town, a girl would go straight from her father's house to her new husband's, and all generations would live together in the family home. A household included not just the extended family, but also the slaves.

The society was patriarchal, that is, the father was the head of the household, and society was based on male authority. The women's main occupation was to manage the

household, produce children – preferably sons – and to do the weaving. Textiles were a measure of wealth, and women were valued by their skills as well as their beauty. The woman offered as a prize in the games is 'skilled in arts and crafts'.

The mortal families which Homer features in the *Iliad* are Priam's family in Troy; the absent families of the Greek heroes and warriors, Agamemnon and Menelaus; and Achilles and Thetis. We get a glimpse too of the family of the gods on Olympus.

The presence of the families is a tool with which Homer emphasises the destructive force of war. The fall of Troy will mean not only the end of the city, but also the tragedy of loved ones being cruelly taken. Family relationships are often mentioned in death scenes, a reminder which highlights the pathos of those deaths.

ACTIVITY

Make a list of all the different family relationships you can think of in the *Iliad*. You will then have a bank of examples for essays.

Friendship

The heroes in the *Iliad* are friends in the sense that they are companions in the war, and support one another. Some get on better than others: Glaucus and Diomedes are bound together in guest-friendship; Diomedes chooses Odysseus as his companion for the expedition in Book 10.

The only relationship that could be considered real friendship is that between Achilles and Patroclus. The impact of the relationship is not really seen until after the death of Patroclus.

We know that they were friends from boyhood, since Peleus brought up Patroclus, and they left together for the war. There is something of the affection of brothers in their friendship, but the intensity of Achilles' grief indicates that they were probably lovers. Both Briseis and Menelaus talk about Patroclus' kindness and gentleness, and Achilles when gently mocking him likens him to a little girl pulling at her mother's skirt. They share the same hut, and Patroclus mixes the wine and cooks the meat as Achilles welcomes the other Greek heroes.

When Patroclus is killed, Achilles is devastated. His grief is extreme, and his thirst for revenge borders on the inhuman.

S & C Revenge and its power to dehumanise is a theme we see too in the *Odyssey*. Although Odysseus has divine help to kill the Suitors, some might say that the killing of all 108 of them and the treatment of the disloyal servants is inhuman. Read *Odyssey* Book 22.

Read *Medea*. In Euripides' play, Medea murders her own children in order to get revenge on her husband Jason.

HOSPITALITY AND GUEST-FRIENDSHIP (*XENIA*)

Xenia is a reciprocal agreement between host and guest. The host must provide the guest with food, drink, a bath and gifts when he leaves, and must not ask the guest who he is before he has eaten. The guest should be courteous, and provide a gift for the host. A story is an acceptable gift. In a world in which travel is hazardous, it is important to know that if you are in need of help, and call at an unknown house for shelter or food, you will be safe. Equally, if you let an unknown traveller into your home, you need to be sure that the traveller will not harm you or steal from you. This acknowledged code of behaviour took on great gravity by being seen as a law sacred to Zeus. To harm your host or guest was to harm Zeus himself, and the consequences of violating *xenia* were dire.

S & C For more information on the ancient concept of friendship, read Plato's *Lysis* and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Books 8 and 9.

Xenia is at the heart of the Trojan myth. Paris, the Trojan prince, violates the sacred rules when he is a guest of King Menelaus of Sparta. He steals Helen, his wife, and sets in motion the Trojan War.

Xenia is crucial to the normal workings of a civilised life and is evident in the way that the Greek warriors eat together. In Book 9, Nestor suggests to Agamemnon that since his hut is full of wine, brought daily from Thrace, he should host dinner: 'All hospitality rests with you, as you are the king over many people.' Agamemnon duly provides 'a feast to please their hearts', and it is only when they have put away their desire for eating and drinking that Nestor makes his proposals. It is part of the law of *xenia* that no guest has demands put upon him until he has had enough to eat.

The decision made by the party is that Phoenix, Ajax and Odysseus should visit Achilles in his hut, and as soon as they enter the hut, we see *xenia* again.

Any arguments Achilles has are forgotten on seeing his friends. 'Even in my anger, you are those I love most of the Greeks,' he says, at the prospect of offering hospitality. He sits his guests on seats 'spread with purple rugs' and instructs Patroclus to mix the wine stronger, an indication of his friendship. Patroclus then roasts more meat and they eat until, again, 'they had put away their desire for eating and drinking'. The fact that this is their second meal does not go unnoticed by Odysseus, and he artfully seizes on it, hoping to bring the same consensus of opinion to the end of this meal as there had been at the last one.

Hospitality as the herald to a request is witnessed too on Olympus. Charis greets Thetis with 'Come inside with me, and let me give you hospitality', and Thetis is duly offered a beautiful chair before Hephaestus is summoned and she is offered food.

The servant girls are worth a mention here, if only because they would seem to be the first evidence of robots and artificial intelligence in literature! 'Waiting women hurried along to their master. They were made of gold, but looked like real girls and could not only speak and use their limbs but were also endowed with intelligence' (Book 18, 418–421).

The impact of *xenia* is seen in the encounter between Glaucus and Diomedes in Book 6. They refuse to fight once they have established that their grandfathers had once exchanged gifts. The bond of friendship forged in a previous generation is stronger than their current fighting. They seal their bond of friendship by exchanging armour.

The most memorable act of *xenia* is that in Book 24, when Achilles welcomes Priam into his hut. The *menis*-dominated Achilles of the rest of the *Iliad* would, we feel, have slaughtered the old man without a second thought, but here we see an Achilles who is returning to the world of civilised men. Priam approaches as a suppliant, using his position as an old man and father to appeal to Achilles' humanity and his love for his own father, Peleus. Achilles offers Priam *xenia* and uses the story of Niobe to make the point that food is necessary when the heart is worn out by grieving. Grief and self-imposed fasting links the two men, and now their eating together will release them both from that phase of their grieving.

When they have finished eating, Priam asks for a bed, which is duly provided, spread 'with fine purple rugs'. The host's parting gift, with which Priam leaves, is the body of his son, Hector.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

Husband and wife

Priam and Hecabe

The production of sons for the continuation of the family was the main consideration of the husband in the ancient world. In the *Iliad*, one model for a family is Priam and Hecabe. He has fifty sons, most of them not with his wife, but with concubines who live in the household. This seems to have been acceptable practice. The number of sons he has sired is an obvious measure of his greatness. It is not surprising that Dolon is a traitor: he is from a family with five daughters! Priam and Hecabe's relationship in itself is not of great concern to Homer. As parents, they are used to emphasise Hector's tragedy. In Book 24, Hecabe urges Priam not to put himself in danger by going to Achilles' hut, and her anger in saying she wants to eat Achilles' liver emphasises his quiet determination.

Hector and Andromache

The relationship between Hector and Andromache is affectionate, and they adore their young son. The scene before Hector's departure, when Astyanax shrinks away at the sight of his father's helmet, is one of the most famous in the *Iliad*. It captures a very human and timeless scene. It is amusing, since the son is needlessly afraid of a helmet, but poignant since we know that this is the last time that father and son will be together. Homer knew well how to stir up emotion in his audience, and this episode would have been a tear-jerker then as it is now. The emotion emphasises Hector's decision that when he has to choose between domestic happiness and fighting Achilles, he will go for the world of the hero and pursue his *kleos*.

Study question
To what extent does Figure 23 reflect the relationship shown in the *Iliad*?

Paris and Helen

Helen professes much dislike of Paris. Aphrodite threatens her into going to bed with him; she cannot bear to look him in the eye and tells him she wishes he was dead. Her attitude makes a mockery of the war. Why had she not given herself up years ago? Because if she had, there would be no story of the ten-year siege to tell!

FIGURE 23
The Loves of Helen and Paris by David (1748–1825).

Menelaus and Helen

Iris put a 'sweet yearning' for him into Helen's heart, but Menelaus is at war for the purpose of his honour. Nowhere does he show affection for Helen.

Peleus and Thetis

Thetis seems to inhabit the sea with the nymphs and does not live with her husband. The essential point about their marriage is that it created the son who was destined to be greater than his father. That son is mortal,

and his mother is divine – hence the struggle in Achilles between his divine wrath and his human character.

Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra

Agamemnon mentions his wife once, and only to say that he rather prefers his newly acquired Trojan slave to her! It is ironic that he is fighting a war to retrieve the wife of his brother when he is quite happy to take another wife himself, and ironic too, that back in Argos, his wife Clytaemnestra has taken a lover.

Zeus and Hera

The divine couple's marriage comes over as rather human and ordinary. All the suspicion, bickering and bullying, shows the gods to be no more superior to men in their domestic relationships, than they are in their morality.

Man and slave

The Greeks are pleased to have for their enjoyment girls and women captured from the Trojan allies. They are commodities rather than people, to be presented as rewards for fighting or prizes in a sporting contest.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN

The relationship between parents and children is central to several aspects of the *Iliad*.

Plot

The beginning of the *Iliad* revolves round parents and children:

- Chryses pleads for the return of his daughter.
- Achilles asks his mother for a favour.
- Thetis pleads for a favour from Zeus for her son.

Emotion

The death of a child provides much of the human and emotional infrastructure of the *Iliad*.

- Thetis, as mother to Achilles, is an immortal mother who knows she will see her mortal son die before long.
- Hecabe and Priam suffer at the death of Hector.
- Andromache dreads the time when her son will be flung from the battlements of Troy.

- Hector wants to protect the child he fears is doomed.
- In battle, deaths are often described in terms of distress to the parents, for example those of Euphorbus and Simoisius.

The obligations towards elderly fathers are particularly important:

- Achilles feels sorrow and guilt for being far from Peleus, his elderly father.
- Hector feels an obligation to protect his parents.

Heroes are aware of their fathers as role-models and their own responsibility for continuing family honour:

- The patronymic is used in epithets.
- Glaucus talks of the hopes his father has for him.
- Nestor advises Antilochus.

The relationship between parents and son is often a troubled one:

- Priam could be seen as responsible for Hector's death, because he breaks the truce and does not return Helen after Paris' defeat.
- Thetis gets Zeus to grant the favour which indirectly leads to the death of Achilles.
- Both Patroclus and Phoenix were estranged from their fathers.

The climax to the *Iliad* is tightly bound up with the father and son relationship:

- Priam has come to beg for the body of his son, the act which will test the humanity of Achilles.
- Hermes leads Priam to Achilles' hut, acting like a son protecting an elderly father.
- Achilles' love for his own father leads him to show humanity towards Priam.

ACTIVITY

Find evidence from the text to support the points made about parents and children.

THE PART PLAYED BY WOMEN IN THE EPIC AND THEIR POSITION IN SOCIETY

Women are at the heart of the Trojan War as they tend to be at the heart of all Greek myths.

The goddess of strife produces the apple; Aphrodite causes Paris to abduct Helen; Helen has to be reclaimed; Chryseis is not returned to her father; Briseis is taken from Achilles; Thetis sets into motion the slaughter of the Greeks . . .

The World of the Hero is a man's world, and the women in it are always seen in relation to men and the war.

In the *Iliad*, the women associated with the Greeks are war captives, slaves used by the heroes as bed-fellows. Their wives are at home and, to many modern eyes at least, there will be irony in the fact that this is a war for the purpose of restoring a marriage, to retrieve a missing wife, when these heroes have no thoughts of those wives left at home!

These women are prizes, a reflection of the hero's *timē*, and as such are valued in the same currency as cups, bowls or oxen.

S & C

Does the role of the women in the plot of the Trojan War story reflect the role of women in society or the concerns of a patriarchal society?

If you are interested in looking at how women are represented in myth and in the ancient world, look at Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (Bodley Head, 2015).

The only person who hints at seeing a captive woman as more than material reward is Achilles, who makes the point that 'any good man of sense loves his own wife and cares for her – as I too loved this girl from my heart, even though I won her by my spear'.

The women of Troy are defined by their relationship to men, and Andromache epitomises the wife whose whole existence is based on her husband and child. She has already seen the death of her family at the hands of Achilles, and is now desperate to keep Hector from going out to fight. He is her protector and without him she feels vulnerable, fearing the prospect of a life of slavery for herself and death for her son. She embodies the suffering of the Trojan women.

Her area of the house is the women's quarters, which is synonymous with wool-making. Textiles, and by extension shrouds, are the responsibility of women. Women have the role of lamenting the dead, and both the Trojan women and the Greek slaves are frequently represented as mourners. Briseis laments the death of Patroclus in the way Andromache, Hecabe and Helen lament Hector. The men fight, but the women are united in their role as victims of the world of the hero.

THE ROLE OF SLAVES

The *Iliad* is about war, and is not a context in which slaves are employed in the way they might be in a domestic setting. In an epic about heroes, there is no place in the action for inferior minds or bodies.

The slaves that we do meet are women – the serving women of the Greeks, who are victims of the war and have been captured, and then purchased or given as rewards. They are now used as serving women or bed partners. The Trojan wives themselves will soon be slaves.

The woman whose capture sets in motion the action of the *Iliad,* Chryseis, is a slave of Agamemnon, as is Briseis, whose removal causes Achilles' wrath. The abrupt change in these women's lives from security in a loving family to being a commodity passed on or sold for the consumption of Greek men, is to us shocking. The woman offered as a prize in the wrestling is worth four oxen.

Briseis seems to have been lucky with her owner; she appears to feel genuine grief at the death of Patroclus, and not to dread the prospect of marriage with Achilles. The serving women that Achilles and Patroclus had won in the war 'shrieked loud in their hearts' grief" at the death of Patroclus, but perhaps only because Homer wants to use them as a chorus to amplify the grief of Achilles. He tells us that the women joined in with the keening – 'the cause was Patroclus, but each of them wept over her own sorrows'.

FIGURE 24
Abducted, sold, enslaved, abused, raped: the fate of women in war has not changed.

Perhaps more disturbing than the women who are already slaves, valued by their beauty and 'skill in handcraft', are those who wait to be taken into slavery. Hector foresees their plight: 'May I be dead and the heaped earth cover me, before I hear your screams and the sound of your being dragged away.' His death will open the final stage towards that disaster.

TOPIC REVIEW

1. How important is the role of the immortals in the action?
2. To what extent can we respect the immortals as they are portrayed in the *Iliad*?
3. Is it true to say that the females in the *Iliad* are no more than passive victims?
4. How does our knowledge of their families shape our understanding of Achilles and Hector?
5. Is it true to say that friendship and families are as important to the *Iliad* as war?

Further Reading

William Allan, Chapters 4 and 5 of *Homer: The Iliad* (Bloomsbury, 2012)
Jasper Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Clarendon Press, 1980)
Peter Jones, Introduction to *The Iliad* (Penguin, 1987)
Ahuvia Kahane, *Homer, a Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury, 2012), Chapters 8 and 9.
Emily Kearns, 'The Gods in the Homeric Epics' in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. R. Fowler (CUP, 2004).

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Passage A: *Iliad* Book 6, 473–93

Then he kissed his beloved son, dandled him in his arms, and prayed aloud: 'Zeus, and all you gods, grant that this boy like me may be foremost among the Trojans, as mighty in strength, and a powerful leader of Ilium. And some day may they say of him, as he returns from war, "He's a better man than his father", and may he bear home the blood-stained armour of those he has slain, so his mother's heart may rejoice.'

With this he placed the child in his dear wife's arms, and she took him to her fragrant breast, smiling through her tears. Her husband was touched with pity at this, and stroked her with his hand, saying: 'Andromache, dear wife, don't grieve for me too deeply yet. None will send me to Hades before my time: though no man, noble or humble, once born can escape his fate. Go home, and attend to your tasks, the loom and spindle, and see the maids work hard. War is a man's concern, the business of every man in Ilium, and mine above all.'

Trans: A. S. Kline

AS Level

1 a. Why has Hector returned to the palace? [1]
b. What has just made Andromache laugh? [1]
c. What is the name of the child? [1]
d. Why do you think Homer includes this scene? [1]

2. How does Homer's use of language make the portrayal of the relationship of Hector and Andromache especially vivid? Make four points, and support each with a reference to the passage. [8]

A Level

1. Explain how Homer creates great emotion in this passage. Use references to the passage to support your answer. [10]
2. How important is the mother and son relationship in the *Iliad*? Use this passage as a starting point, and justify your response. [20]

The *Odyssey*

2.1 Literary Techniques and Composition

TOPIC OVERVIEW

- structure and plot of the epic
- language of the epic including narrative and descriptive techniques and their effects; such as speeches, formulae, flashback, and similes

The following prescribed sources are covered in this topic:

- Homer, *Odyssey*, Books 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23

Remember that you will be given credit in the exam if you study extra sources and make relevant use of them in your answers.

This topic looks briefly at the plot, and examines: the way the epic is told, including the role of the bard; features of the structure, including speeches, flashback, repetitions; and descriptive techniques such as similes.

STRUCTURE AND PLOT

Composition: the bard

'All men honour and respect bards, for the Muse has taught them songs and she loves the minstrel fraternity' (*Odyssey* 8, 480).

Odysseus himself assumes the role of a bard in four books. His skill in telling stories will help him get safe passage back to Ithaca, fool his household, and enable him to kill the Suitors.

Alcinous remarks that he tells his tale with 'all the artistry of a bard' (Book 11, 370). Eumaeus says, 'With the tales he can tell, the man would hold you spellbound. It was like fixing one's eyes on a minstrel who has been taught by the gods to sing words that bring delight to mortals' (Book 17, 512–520). When Odysseus approaches his palace he pauses, not because of anything he has seen, but because he has heard the 'notes of a polished lyre' (Book 17, 260). It is as though the presence of the bard is a key part of the story of his homecoming.

The two trained bards described in the *Odyssey* have small but significant roles.

EXAM TIP

Learners may use any translation of the text but where a translation is printed on the question paper, two versions will be used:
Homer: The Odyssey, translated by E. V. Rieu, revised translation by D. C. H. Rieu (Penguin, 1991)
Homer: Odyssey – The Wanderings of Odysseus, translated by A. S. Kline (http://www.poetryintranslation.com)

The spellings of names in translations vary, for example, Kikonians/Cicones. Line references used in this book may not correspond exactly with those in individual translations.

Phemius

Phemius' presence frames the poem. In Book 1 (337–359) he sings about the Achaeans' return from Troy, and in Book 22 (330–360) he escapes being killed by Odysseus. He is last seen sitting on the altar of Zeus.

Demodocus

Demodocus is blind. The description of the squire bringing him in (Book 8, 62–71) led to the conclusion that Homer himself must have been blind, and that is how he was depicted in the many statues celebrating him. Demodocus is introduced by Alcinous as having a special gift from the gods through his ability to delight with his song. He sings three songs in Book 8, as a prelude to Odysseus' four books of stories. All his stories resonate in some special way with Odysseus' predicament.

The first story (lines 72–85) concerns a quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles. There is no reference to this episode outside the *Odyssey.* Perhaps it has been included to match Odysseus with the greatest of the Greek warriors and to enhance his reputation.

The second story (lines 266–369) is about Ares and Aphrodite. Adulterous lovers are a subject not far from Odysseus' mind as he thinks about Penelope. The divine lovers are caught out through the trickery of a wronged husband and a net. Here we see another link to Ithaca, where Penelope has been weaving her own trickery to deceive the Suitors. Odysseus will in turn get caught in a bed-related trap, when Penelope tricks him into thinking that she has moved their immoveable bed. The parallel between the lame Hephaestus and Odysseus can be drawn further, when he makes much of the fact that his legs have lost their power. The moral of the story is that wrong will be punished.

The final song (lines 485–520) is about the stratagem of the Wooden Horse, sung at Odysseus' own request. We see his cleverness in reminding the audience of one of his own heroic acts.

The links between Odysseus and the bard are brought to a climax when Odysseus picks up the bow. It will at once allow him to reveal his identity and punish the Suitors.

Study questions

1 Look at the first story told by Demodocus, and Odysseus' meeting with Achilles in the Underworld (Book 11, 470–540).
2 What are the differences between Odysseus and Achilles?

FIGURE 25
Homer by Leloir (1841). Use your knowledge of classical civilisation to say why this painting of Homer could never be a real historical scene.

As he picks it up, Homer makes the connection explicit with a parallel image in which the stringing of the bow is mirrored by the stringing of a lyre (Book 21, 401–412). It is as though the bow has been transformed into a lyre. What will destroy the Suitors is not so much arrows from a bow but the final note of a perfectly performed song.

EXPLORE FURTHER

To help you appreciate the text in detail as you read, have to hand Peter Jones' *Homer's Odyssey: A Commentary Based on the English Translation of Richard Lattimore* (Bloomsbury, 2013).

It is useful with any translation, not just Lattimore's.

The Plot

Book 1 It is ten years since the Trojan War ended, and all the heroes except Odysseus have returned home. He is being kept on the island of Ogygia by Calypso. Back in Ithaca, Penelope is still waiting for Odysseus to return, and coping with the Suitors, who have besieged the palace. Telemachus is in despair, thinking that his father must be dead.

At a council of the gods, Athene asks Zeus to allow Odysseus to return home. Zeus agrees and she goes to Ithaca in disguise.

She tells Telemachus that he should try to get news of his father. She fills him with strength and confidence. The bard sings about Greek warriors returning from Troy, but Penelope is upset and asks him to sing something else. Telemachus with his new-found boldness rebukes her, and tells the Suitors that he will order them to leave. He goes to bed and ponders on Athene's advice.

Book 2 Telemachus calls the assembly and criticises the Suitors. Antinous in turn criticises Penelope. Zeus sends an omen and Telemachus secretly leaves. Athene accompanies him, disguised as Mentor.

Book 3 Telemachus visits Nestor in Pylos. He finds out about the return home of other Greek warriors, but gets no news of Odysseus.

Book 4 Telemachus visits Helen and Menelaus. They tell him about Odysseus' exploits in Troy, and that his father is still alive. He leaves for Ithaca. The Suitors, meanwhile, plan to ambush him.

Book 5 Zeus sends Hermes to order Calypso to release Odysseus. She reluctantly agrees, and he builds a raft and leaves. Before he can reach land, Poseidon destroys his raft, but finally, with the help of Ino, he eventually lands and falls asleep.

Book 6 Odysseus has reached the land of the Phaeacians. Athene sends a dream to Nausicaa suggesting she should go down to the river to wash some clothes. When she is there she meets the naked Odysseus, whom she looks after and then directs to the palace. She asks him not to accompany her, for fear of scandal.

Book 7 Odysseus is directed to the palace by Athene in disguise. A detailed description of the palace and gardens shows how special this place is. When Odysseus arrives in the hall, he begs for help from Arete. He is well received by King Alcinous and is promised transport home. Arete recognises his clothes and asks who he is, but he evades the question. They all go to bed.

Book 8 The Phaeacian assembly agrees to take Odysseus home, and everyone goes back to the palace for a banquet. The bard, Demodocus, entertains them. Alcinous sees that Odysseus is upset and so suggests an athletics contest. Odysseus is challenged and hurls the discus the furthest. Alcinous introduces some dancing, and then Demodocus sings of the affair of Ares and Aphrodite. There is more dancing, gifts and feasting. Odysseus weeps at a song about Troy, and Alcinous finally asks him who he is.

Book 9 Odysseus reveals his identity and tells the story of his adventures with the Cicones, the Lotus Eaters, and Polyphemus, the Cyclops. As he leaves the blinded Cyclops, Odysseus shouts out his own name, thus allowing the giant to call upon his father, Poseidon, to punish Odysseus.

ACTIVITY

Plotting Odysseus' possible route on a map may help you to memorise his journey

Book 10 Odysseus arrives at the island of Aeolus and stays for a month. The king's gift to him is a bag which contains all the hostile winds. Just as they are within sight of home, the crew open the bag, and the ships are blown back to Aeolus, who this time sends them away. They arrive at Telepylus where the Laestrygonians destroy eleven of the ships. Odysseus' ship escapes, and comes to Aeaea, the home of Circe who transforms some of his men into pigs. Odysseus, with help from Hermes, resists Circe's magic, and with the men restored to human form, the whole crew is entertained for a year. Circe tells Odysseus that he must visit the Land of the Dead. As they leave, Elpenor falls off the roof and dies.

Book 11 Odysseus goes to the Land of the Dead and carries out the rituals described by Circe. He meets Elpenor who asks to be buried; Teiresias, who tells him of his future; and his mother, who answers his questions about his family. Odysseus is ready to stop his tale, but Arete and Alcinous want him to continue. He goes on, telling of encounters with Agamemnon, Achilles, Ajax and various heroes and villains.

Book 12 Odysseus and his men return to Circe's palace and bury Elpenor. Circe warns Odysseus of the dangers on the voyage home. They reach Thrinacie, where the men eat the cattle of the sun god. He demands vengeance and Zeus destroys the ship. Odysseus is the sole survivor. He gets to Calypso's island (and so to Book 5).

Book 13 Odysseus' tale ends and, laden with gifts, he sets sail for home. He is asleep when the Phaeacians leave him on Ithaca. Poseidon wants to punish the Phaeacians for transporting Odysseus, by encircling their city with mountains, though Zeus tries to dissuade him. Odysseus wakes up not knowing where he is, but Athene arrives in disguise and Odysseus lies to her about his identity. Athene reveals herself and helps him to plan his return to the palace. She then goes to Sparta to fetch Telemachus back.

Book 14 Odysseus goes to see Eumaeus, a loyal swineherd. Eumaeus laments the absence of his master and tells of his disgust at the behaviour of the Suitors. He shows perfect *xenia* towards his guest.

Book 15 Telemachus leaves Sparta and returns to Ithaca, safely slipping past the murderous Suitors. Meanwhile, Eumaeus tells Odysseus his story.

FIGURE 26
Gustav Klimt's painting of Pallas Athene.

Book 16 Telemachus arrives at Eumaeus' hut and meets the beggar (Odysseus). Telemachus sends Eumaeus to the palace and Athene tells Odysseus to reveal himself to his son. In the palace the Suitors are furious that Telemachus has evaded their ambush, and Penelope berates Antinous for plotting against her son.

Book 17 Telemachus greets his mother. The Suitors are enjoying themselves. Eumaeus and the beggar meet the servant Melanthius, who is abusive. They arrive at the palace. The beggar (Odysseus) enters the hall, begs for food and is assaulted by Antinous. Penelope sends for the beggar, who replies that he will talk to her later.

Book 18 Odysseus fights with Irus and wins. Penelope sees the Suitors, and beautified by Athene, extorts valuable gifts from them. Odysseus is impressed by her cunning. He is insulted by

S & C Athene is the power behind the plot in the *Odyssey*, and her physical might is evident in the Klimt painting in Fig. 26. Critics also point out her 'sensual allure' (Catherine Dean, *Klimt*, Phaidon, 1996). How well does the painting in Fig. 26 reflect the Athene whom Homer shows us in the *Odyssey*? Research other images of Athene in ancient and modern art.

Eurymachus, who throws a stool at him. He ducks and it misses. Amphinomus calms the situation, and the Suitors leave.

Book 19 Odysseus and Telemachus remove the weapons from the hall. Odysseus tells Penelope about his travels. His tale is a mixture of truth and lies. Penelope asks Eurycleia to wash the beggar's feet, and the nurse sees the scar. Odysseus warns her to say nothing. Penelope tests the beggar to find out whether he really met Odysseus, and asks him to interpret her dream. She tells him about the challenge with the bow.

Book 20 Odysseus and Penelope both have sleepless nights worrying about the Suitors. The next day, the Suitors return for a festival. Odysseus is introduced to Philoetius. Zeus sends omens.

Book 21 Penelope brings the bow to the Suitors and issues her challenge. Telemachus attempts to string it and almost succeeds. The Suitors fail. Odysseus reveals himself to Eumaeus and Philoetius. Eurycleia bars the doors. Odysseus strings the bow.

Book 22 Odysseus begins to shoot the Suitors. Telemachus goes to the store room to fetch more weapons. He realises that he has left the door open and catches Melanthius taking weapons. Athene, disguised as Mentor, helps Odysseus, and eventually all the Suitors are killed. The house is cleansed and the treacherous servants killed.

Book 23 Eurycleia tells Penelope that Odysseus has returned, but she does not believe her maid. Eventually she goes down and sits with her husband in the hall. Athene has made him handsome, but she will not acknowledge him until she has tested him. Penelope is finally convinced of his identity, and they go off to bed.

Book 24 The ghosts of the Suitors arrive in Hades. Odysseus is reunited with his father. The Suitors' relatives prepare to take their revenge, but Zeus and Athene intervene, restoring peace to Ithaca.

ACTIVITIES

Understanding the plot is not difficult: read fairly quickly the first time (or listen to a recording). Read a book at a time, and make some notes to help fix the story and names of characters in your mind.

Do some of the activities on the Companion Website to help you remember the basics. CW

When you reread the Odyssey book by book, it is useful to look beyond the actual events of the plot, and ask what a particular book adds to the poem as a whole. For example: **How important is Book 11? Is it essential?**

EXAM TIP

If a question asks about the importance of a particular book, don't retell the story. Analyse how it contributes to the plot, characterisation, themes and poetry of the whole epic.

- Odysseus does not need to visit the Underworld for the purposes of the plot. There is no direct consequence to his visit. He leaves Circe in Book 10 and returns to her in 12. She gives him the same advice about his journey as Teiresias gave him.
- Agamemnon gives Odysseus advice to make a secret approach when he returns to Ithaca, but surely Odysseus is too clever to need that advice!
- It results in problems of continuity.
  - Somebody would have noticed Elpenor's body.
  - Telemachus must be thirteen, but he is described as 'in peaceful possession of his lands', as though he is much older.

However, Book 11 adds to the *Odyssey* because it:

- fits in well with epic, as it is another adventure on a long journey
- tells us more about Odysseus' character:
  - It emphasises his heroic qualities: only heroes like Herakles can go down to Hades and return.
  - It allows us to see a more emotional side to Odysseus –of his mother he says, 'My eyes filled with tears when I saw her.'
  - Trojan War heroes are relevant to his past and his heroic status; Achilles, Agamemnon, and Ajax are all seen as his close companions.
- explains the presence of the Suitors – Laertes has left in despair and so is not in the palace to take control.
- links with the themes of:
  - family: in the catalogue of women, Tyro, Antiope, Epicaste (Jocasta) Leda, Phaedra . . . all have family problems. Compare these to Odysseus and his loyal wife.
  - loyalty: Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra are compared to Odysseus and Penelope, highlighting Penelope's loyalty
  - justice: the Suitors will be punished, like Sisyphus and Tantalus
  - storytelling: when Odysseus pauses, the audience ask him to continue. This underlines Odysseus' skill in storytelling
  - value of life: Achilles tells Odysseus that life is precious – he would have anything rather than death.

When you are learning the plot, consider the importance of episodes that might span several books. Consider the following question:

'Why is the episode with the Phaeacians judged to be so important to the *Odyssey*?'

Below are some pointers for use in an answer. You will need to look up the references yourself. Constant re-reading the text for different purposes helps you to learn the content and to identify lines useful as evidence in an answer to support your arguments.

The episode with the Phaeacians is important because of the following:

The narrative provides:

- a bridge between the fantastical and the real world
- an opportunity for the flashback
- a contrast with the Suitors
- echoes of family life at the palace in Ithaca
- contrast with other episodes, for example, the meeting with the daughter of Antiphates, and the Cyclopes
- opportunities for other stories: the bard tells three stories; Odysseus retells the story to Arete to explain the cloak
- tension, through the creation of an audience who may not be friendly

The theme of family life and relationships is promoted through:

- the close relationship of Arete and Alcinous
- an affectionate father–daughter relationship
- Nausicaa's brothers, who are waiting for her
- servants who work productively
- Eurymedusa having a close relationship with Nausicaa, as Eurycleia has with Telemachus.

The concept of *kleos* is explored:

- Odysseus says that if Alcinous takes him back to Ithaca, he will have everlasting fame.
- Nausicaa hopes she will be remembered for saving Odysseus.

The importance of *timē* to the hero is emphasised:

- Odysseus is honoured by being given much treasure.

The gods have an important role:

- Zeus: Travellers like Odysseus are sacred to Zeus, the patron of suppliants.
- Athene: Note her interventions in this episode. Although she helps, she is wary of upsetting Poseidon by appearing in front of Odysseus. As goddess of handicrafts, she gives the Phaeacian women their outstanding wool-making skills.
- Poseidon: His hostility to Odysseus underlies the episode. Although he is the ancestor of Alcinous, and the Phaeacians' ability to sail magically fast is a gift from him, he is threatening. He has foretold that one day he will wreck one of their returning ships.

We learn more about the behaviour of the hero:

- Book 8 is useful in showing more about the hero. Odysseus needs to establish his heroic status without revealing his identity. In responding to the insult that he is a merchant, he accepts the challenge to compete in the games. Athene makes him taller and gives him divine beauty.

Xenia:

- Nausicaa gives a good definition of *xenia* when she explains to her companions why they should look after Odysseus.

Deception runs throughout the episode:

- Athene pretends to be various people: the daughter of Dymas, a young girl, a herald, and a bystander.
- Nausicaa does not admit to her father that she is thinking of marriage.
- Alcinous pretends not to know about her secret thoughts.
- Odysseus has an ulterior motive in flattering Nausicaa, and she has an ulterior motive in responding to him.
- Athene makes Odysseus look more handsome.
- Odysseus does not tell Arete the whole truth about Calypso.
- Odysseus hides his identity throughout Books 6, 7 and 8.
- The bard sings about the deception of Hephaestus and the trickery of the wooden horse.

The Structure of the *Odyssey*

The structure of the *Odyssey* is a topic still much debated.

One way to examine it is to look at the chronological sequence. The table below shows the events from the marriage of Odysseus' parents, through to the reconciliation with Laertes (Book 24). A quick glance will show that these events are not revealed in chronological order.

Chronological sequence	***Odyssey* book number**
Laertes and Anticleia marry.	11
Eurycleia is bought as a slave.	1
They have a son, Odysseus.	19
Eurycleia is his nurse.	19
As a young man, Odysseus goes on a boar hunt and is wounded on his leg.	19
He has a dog called Argus.	17
He is given a bow which is special to him and which he keeps safely locked away in Ithaca.	21
He marries Penelope.	2
He builds a special bed, constructed round an olive tree.	23
Telemachus is born.	4

Chronological sequence	*Odyssey* book number
He leaves for Troy, telling Penelope that she is to remarry if he has not returned by the time Telemachus becomes a man.	18
He devises the wooden horse trick.	8
Other Greek leaders (Nestor and Menelaus) arrive home.	3 and 4
Agamemnon is killed by his wife.	1, 4 and 11
Odysseus travels and has adventures.	9–12
He is eventually washed up on Ogygia, Calypso's island, where he stays for seven years.	5
In year 4 of his stay on Ogygia, the Suitors move into the palace.	11
Telemachus is grown up and in despair.	1
Penelope has to choose a husband from the Suitors.	1
Athene asks for Odysseus to be released.	1 and 5
Telemachus visits Nestor and Menelaus, looking for news of his father.	3 and 4
Odysseus is released.	5
Odysseus gets to the Phaeacians and receives *xenia*.	6–13
Odysseus plots to kill the Suitors and then does so.	13–23
Odysseus reunites with Laertes.	24
Peace is restored in Ithaca.	24

A defining feature of an epic is that it covers a long expanse of time or space. The *Odyssey* concerns Odysseus' ten-year-long journey to Ithaca from Troy, but we accompany him for very little of that time.

Year of absence	How the events of this time are narrated in the *Odyssey*
1–3	Told in flashback books
4–10	Seven years hidden by Calypso. No information except for the last few days.
10	From Ogygia to Scherie
	From Scherie to Ithaca

Within the books, time can be rushed over or dwelt upon.

Book	Days	Events
1–4	Six days	Telemachus goes to Pylos and Sparta.
5–12	28	Four days of raft building (one line).
		Seventeen days at sea (one line).
		Three days of storms and swimming.
		Three days with Phaeacians (seven books).
13–23:	7	
13	1	Odysseus wakes up on Ithaca and talks to Athene.
14–15	2	Telemachus returns.
16	1	Telemachus and Odysseus meet.
17–23	2	Odysseus at the Palace.
24	1	Odysseus meets his father.

The flashback

The flashback in Books 9 to 12:

- separates the fantasy element from the real-life Ithaca books;
- allows Odysseus to project his own character;
- gives Odysseus a heroic warrior scene, as he raids the Cicones, taking all the supplies he needs;
- is a means of telling Odysseus' past, present and future;
- allows him to find out about the current situation in Ithaca;
- affects the response of the audience, who will feel a sense of complicity with the teller;
- introduces dramatic irony: the audience know that the storyteller must have got the better of the aggressors;
- allows us to view Odysseus as one of the company of great heroes, now dead;
- provides a double irony for those who really want to probe the question of narrative: since Odysseus is the master spinner of tales, can we really believe anything he is telling us?
- falls neatly into the underlying theme of *xenia*: this story is Odysseus' gift to the Phaeacians in return for their hospitality.

As we listen to Odysseus' story, we might wonder how the Phaeacians are receiving his tale. Do they believe him? How are they reacting to a horror story about the Cyclopes

whom they dislike, but to whom they are, after all, closely related, with Poseidon as a common ancestor?

Epithets

Epithets often describe personal characteristics such as 'thoughtful' or 'cunning'; sometimes they define status, as in 'bright-eyed' Athene (immortals shine), or 'white-armed' Nausicaa (noble women do not work in the sun). The essential nature of objects or places is also expressed in epithets, such as 'black' ship, 'tuneful' lyre, 'mellow' wine, 'woody' Zakynthos or 'sea-girt' Ithaca.

They are used frequently by oral poets because they form phrases which fit into the metre of the poetry and can be slotted in during composition like prefabricated units.

ACTIVITY

Review the epithets used of each character. How well do they describe the character as portrayed in the *Odyssey*?

Formulae

Formulae are phrases which slot into the narrative, familiar markers of time and rituals.

The most common is 'rosy-fingered dawn', for example: Book 5, 1, 228, 390; Book 6, 48; Book 8, 1; Book 9, 152, 170, 308, 560; Book 10, 188; Book 12, 9, 315; Book 13, 16; Book 17, 1; Book 19, 428.

They often occur in scenes which are repeated, called 'type-scenes'.

- Retiring for the night

  Book 5, 225: Odysseus and Calypso
  Book 5, 481: Odysseus under the olive bushes
  Book 7, 334: Odysseus, Alcinous, Arete
  Book 9, 169: the men by ships
  Book 10, 12: Aeolus and his wife
  Book 12, 30: the men by the ships
  Book 18, 427: the Suitors
  Book 23, 289: Odysseus and Penelope

- Penelope and her veil

  Book 1, 332; Book 16, 415; Book 18, 207

- Greeting a stranger

  Book 1, 169: Telemachus questions Athene in disguise
  Book 16, 59: Telemachus questions the beggar
  Book 16, 224: Telemachus questions Odysseus

ACTIVITY

Look up the references to the type-scenes, and pick out what they have in common. What formulae are used?

Find your own references to the formulae used in meal and bath scenes.

Parallel Scenes

Repeated images, scenes, actions, snatches of dialogue and similes are woven into the narrative, and the patterns produced bring an added level of understanding and appreciation. Each new reading brings the discovery of a new parallel scene or reworking of an image.

The ancient audience will not have had the opportunity for intensive study, but perhaps their more highly tuned memories would have enabled them to appreciate the effects.

The descriptions of *xenia* all follow a similar pattern. The repetition underlines the fact that the plot moves from one instance of good or bad *xenia* to another, and that *xenia* causes the Trojan War and results in the deaths of the Suitors.

Many of the repeated scenes have resonances with the destruction of the Suitors. In Book 8, for example, Euryalus insults Odysseus, saying that he is more like a captain on a merchant ship than an athlete. Euryalus gets a sharp response from Odysseus – 'you are distinguished in appearance . . . but you are short of brains' – and he pays for his ineptness by having to give Odysseus expensive gifts as compensation. In Book 17 there is a similar pattern in the interaction between Antinous and Odysseus, with the Suitor being told, 'You haven't the brains to match your looks.' We know that Antinous will pay the ultimate price for his insults to Odysseus

Just after the Euryalus interchange in Book 8, Odysseus outlines his sporting achievements, adding, 'I can handle the polished bow well and I would be the first to pick off my man with an arrow in the enemy ranks.' The Suitors will observe this skill first-hand in Book 21.

The bard's songs in Book 8 have resonances throughout the epic. The tortoise and hare image is used to point out how Hephaestus, although he was lame, caught Ares because he used his cunning. Odysseus has just complained to Alcinous' sons that his legs have lost their power, and in Book 17 when he sets out for the palace, his feigned lameness is again mentioned. This, together with the mention of cunning, shows clear parallels.

The episode with the beggar Irus links back to the challenge in Book 8 and foreshadows the battle with the Suitors. As Irus falls to Odysseus' blows, he drums the earth with his feet, much to the amusement of the Suitors. Their fate will be the same: Antinous' foot 'lashes out', and the dying Eurymachus 'rocks a chair with his foot'. After the fight, Irus is propped up against the courtyard wall, a place that will soon be a resting place for the Suitors' corpses.

In the feet-washing episode, Odysseus' potential power is brought to mind by another repeated image. In Book 6 he has taken refuge in an olive bush so dense that nothing could penetrate it. The same words are used of the bush in the story of the boar hunt. Odysseus has crept out of the bush powerless and vulnerable in front of Nausicaa, but the boar here emerges with bristling back and flaming eyes. The Odysseus who will emerge from the shelter of the beggar's disguise will be every bit as fierce as the boar that delivered his scar.

In another image, Odysseus clings to a fig tree 'like a bat' on the top of a cliff. A similar image, with not such a happy ending, is that of Melanthius, hauled up to the rafters and told he can await the dawn from his vantage point.

The repetitions of wisps of smoke, fires and hearths is a strong thread which links Odysseus with stages of his homecoming. In Book 1, Athene tells Zeus he would give anything for the sight of 'the smoke rising from his own land'. Too often smoke spells disaster, and the Cyclopes' fires visible from Goat Island, the wisp rising from the countryside in the land of the Laestrygonians and, arguably, that from Circe's palace would all have been better avoided. When Aeolus' winds carry the ship to the edge of Ithaca, the crew are close enough to see men tending their fires. On his arrival at Alcinous' palace,

Odysseus sits by the hearth, and on his return to Ithaca, it is by the light of the fire that he has his first meeting with Penelope.

Repeated images emphasise the heroism of Odysseus. Twice Athene endows him with beauty, making his bushy locks as thick as hyacinth petals and his body shine like a silver statue overlaid with gold. Repeated images link Odysseus and Telemachus. When Odysseus is competing in the athletics contest, Athene makes him taller and broader so that he will inspire fear and respect. Telemachus is given the same treatment on his return to Ithaca.

Penelope appears mostly in the Ithaca books, but she has strong links through repetitions with the women in Phaeacia. She shows her dexterity and strength as she opens the door to the store room, when fetching the bow. In her mind is her challenge to the Suitors, whom she is trying to manipulate. Nausicaa is also well coordinated and feisty, as shown by her flicking the whip or harnessing the mules. With her devious thinking, she plans to convince people that the man she hopes will be a suitor is unknown to her.

There are links between Penelope and Arete, who is depicted sitting at the hearth, spinning. She tests Odysseus by asking him questions about the cloak he is wearing. Penelope also spends her time weaving and she tests the beggar by asking about Odysseus' cloak. Homer connects the women with threads which form a web of feminine power.

There are other parallels, perhaps subtly woven, perhaps random – a beautiful woman greets Odysseus as he wakes up on the beach, a wise guide has a close association with pigs, Eurycleia and Eumaeus spill water in their excitement at recognising a loved one. Whether we analyse them or not, they are an integral part of Homer's composition.

Speeches

About 8,000 of the 12,000 lines of the *Odyssey* are in direct speech, something which Aristotle admired. He praised Homer for understanding that it was better for the narrator to let the character talk for himself. The bard performing the poetry would have had every opportunity to capitalise on the speeches, and to bring his performance alive in a dramatic way.

S & C Study what Aristotle says in *Poetics* 24 about Homer's use of direct speech, and relate what he says to the *Odyssey*.

Speeches give information, together with an insight into the speaker's character and perspective on events.

They put more responsibility on the listener, who, without the author's voice to give explanations, has to determine what the purpose of the speech is, and whether it is genuine.

Homer uses both short interchanges and longer speeches, varying the pace.

Speeches and dialogue are important to the epic because they:

- display a character's rhetorical skills through clever use of language to persuade, manipulate or provoke
- convey character through the tone that the speaker uses
- emphasise irony
- create atmosphere by being, for example, shouted or whispered
- reveal much about relationships
- convey emotion.

ACTIVITY

Study the speeches made by Antinous, Eurymachus and Amphinomus. They are all Suitors, but have distinctive characters.

Now play the psychiatrist: write a report on one of them and present your report to your class. Use quotations from the speeches listed to justify the conclusions you are drawing about the character.

Antinous

1, 383–386 to Telemachus
16, 363–393 to the Suitors
17, 375–379 to Eumaeus
17, 445–480 argument with the beggar
18, 35–88 the Irus–Odysseus fight
21, 85–93 to Eumaeus and Philoetius
21, 255–268 to Eurymachus
21, 288–310 to the Suitors and the beggar

Eurymachus

1, 400–412 to Telemachus
16, 435–446 to Penelope
18, 243–249 to Penelope
18, 349–392 to the beggar
21, 249–254 to the Suitors
21, 320–330 to Penelope
22, 41–79 to Odysseus

Amphinomus

16, 351–357 to the Suitors
16, 400–406 to the Suitors
18, 412–421 to the Suitors

Odysseus' speeches allow him to reveal his heroic qualities. Many speeches or pieces of dialogue show his:

- ability to spin a convincing tale
- ability to twist language to his own advantage
- familiarity with the gods
- refusal to be patronised or insulted
- belief that the laws of Zeus must be obeyed
- desire for *kleos*
- desire for *timē*
- love of Ithaca
- skills as a craftsman.

ACTIVITY

Find and analyse instances of Odysseus' heroic qualities from the list given here.

An examination of Penelope from direct speech might help us understand why she seems so enigmatic. Homer often describes her as standing by a pillar and crying, but he never shares her innermost thoughts. When she tells her maids that she is going to talk to the Suitors, what is in her mind? When she tells Eurymachus that a real suitor would give her expensive gifts, is she just teasing him? Is she hoping to get the Suitors to pay some of their expenses and so recover the finances of the household? Is she really going to choose her future husband based on the quality of the gifts?

Study questions

Find all the things that others say about Penelope, and what she says for herself. Do you get a coherent picture of her character? Here are some examples:

Speeches to or about Penelope	**Penelope's speeches**
1, 345–360 Telemachus	1, 337–344 to Phemius
5, 214–220 Odysseus	16, 418–434 to Antinous
11, 440–449 Agamemnon	17, 100–106 to Telemachus
13, 375–382 Athene	17, 498–503 to maids
17, 5–9; 44–56 Telemachus	18, 162–183 to Eurynome
	19, 123–600 various speeches to the beggar
	21, 69–79, 310–342 to the Suitors
	23 throughout

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

The epics:

> 'were not produced by singers obsessed with merely getting their verses to scan; many forms of artistry are unmistakably visible. One is that the speeches use an importantly different style and vocabulary from the narrative . . . We are meant to judge, but not be bullied into judgment by the poet; his people, more human than the Muse, help us to do it.'
>
> Jasper Griffin in *The Speeches* in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Robert Fowler (CUP, 2004)

What picture of Telemachus do we get from his speeches in Book 16, and of Penelope in Book 19 from hers?

Look at how they interact with the people they are speaking to, the sort of language they use and what might have motivated them to speak as they do.

Description

One thing that brings the *Odyssey* alive is the inclusion, in the middle of a fictional world, of everyday objects described with the detail of a close-up photograph. For example, the blade of Calypso's axe and its 'handle of olive-wood fixed firmly to its head' and Penelope's 'bronze key with an ivory handle' are easily imagined by the audience. The wicker cheese-baskets and bowls swimming with whey give the Cyclops' cave the air of a small-time dairy, and the twirling drill simile makes the blinding of the monster look like an engineering project.

ACTIVITY

A. Camps talks about 'This effective but effortless appeal to the hearer's eye and ear' (*An Introduction to Homer*, OUP, 1980).

How many examples can you find to support Camps' observation? Jot down examples as you read.

Homer uses sounds effectively. They can be subtle, such as the sizzling of the pole as it goes into Polyphemus' eye, or the ringing of the bow-string or the sound of music audible from outside the palace. They can be loud, such as the clang of metal as Eurycleia drops Odysseus' foot in the basin, or the wailing of Odysseus and Telemachus, 'piercingly and more convulsively than birds of prey'.

Communication can be effective in its subtlety: Telemachus 'glanced at his father with a smile' when Eumaeus describes the ship returning to port, and Odysseus stops Telemachus stringing the bow 'with a shake of the head'.

Small actions can engage the audience at a mundane level. Odysseus examines the bow for woodworm. Eurycleia asks who will hold the torch. Arete gives her daughter a packed lunch for her day out, just as she is climbing in the wagon: why only then? Was it an afterthought? Was she afraid Nausicaa would spill the oil if she tried to climb in while carrying it? Small human observations by Homer can trigger similar ones in his readers today, and perhaps they did in keen-minded members of the bard's original audience.

Similes

The Homeric simile is one which is extended into a complete picture, giving more aspects of similarity to contemplate, and often opening up new perspectives. The table below gives some instances.

ACTIVITY

What is being compared in these similes?

Text reference	Simile
Book 5, 43	like a sea-gull drenching the feathers of its wings
Book 5, 326	like the North Wind at harvest-time
Book 5, 434	like the pebbles that stick to the suckers of a squid
Book 5, 487	as a farmer on a lonely farm
Book 6, 129	like a mountain lion who sallies out
Book 6, 232; Book 23, 157	thick as the petals of a hyacinth in bloom
Book 7, 105	their hands fluttering like the leaves of a tall poplar
Book 8, 523	the body of her beloved husband, fallen in battle
Book 9, 51	thick as the leaves and flowers in spring
Book 9, 289	as though they had been puppies
Book 9, 383	like a man boring a ship's timber
Book 9, 390	an axe or adze hisses
Book 10, 124	They carried them off like fishes on a spear

Text reference	Simile
Book 10, 412	It was like the scene at a farm when cows in a drove come home
Book 12, 251	For like an angler on a jutting point
Book 13, 82	like a team of four stallions on the plain
Book 16, 214	they cried aloud piercingly and more convulsively than birds of prey
Book 19, 204	As the snow that the West Wind has brought melts on the mountain-tops
Book 21, 411	with a sound like a swallow's note
Book 22, 300	like a herd of cattle that a darting gadfly has attacked and stampeded
Book 22, 302	just as vultures from the hills, with curving claws and crooked beaks
Book 23, 233	It was like the moment when the blissful land is seen by struggling sailors

Study questions

1. In what sort of situation does Homer use extended similes?
2. Can you group them in any way?
3. What areas of life does he take his similes from?
4. How do the similes make the comparison more vivid?

EXAM TIP

In an examination, there could be a question directly about similes.

Similes can also be used to support arguments in a range of contexts. Find similes that you could include in answers about: exciting episodes; the portrayal of suffering; horror; humour; characters; and emotion.

Stories

Within the main narrative, Homer includes many stories. The main one is the flashback in Books 9–12. The stories, being mostly self-contained units, are a useful tool for the oral poet building his poem. Some of the stories are in the form of Odysseus' 'lying tales' which he tells on his return to Ithaca. Of course, he needs to keep up the fiction of the beggar and give an account of himself in role, but, as Athene observes, he delights in making up tales. The stories he makes up have just enough truth in them to engage the audience, who, as they listened, perhaps enjoyed the challenge of detecting what was a lie.

The stories provide suspense, because Odysseus could be found out, and they are rich in dramatic irony, because the audience is fully aware of the truth.

Other stories take the form of digressions, such as those of the bow (Book 21) and the origin of the scar (Book 19). They have a dramatic purpose in freezing the action at a crucial point, but also provide more evidence of Odysseus' heroic past.

Study question

1. The invocation to the Muse ends with: 'Tell us this story, goddess daughter of Zeus, beginning at whatever point you will.' Do stories have to begin at the beginning?
2. How does the order in which things are narrated make the *Odyssey* more engaging?

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'The so-called "reverse simile" in which Penelope's gladness at seeing her husband is like the gladness of the survivors of a ship wrecked by Poseidon who have managed to swim to shore safely (23, 233–40), has particular force because Odysseus himself in Books 5 and 12 has been represented as such a survivor. This simile and others that reverse normal male and female roles and experiences (8, 523), are of special thematic importance in a poem that seems to value others' viewpoints and that is concerned with analogies between the heroism of Odysseus and that of Penelope and with the powerful role of Penelope and women generally.'

Seth Schein, *Reading the Odyssey, Selected Interpretive Essays* (Princeton University Press, 1996)

TOPIC REVIEW

1. How effective are the techniques Homer uses in a given passage?
2. How does direct speech make a given passage dramatic?
3. How does Homer make a given scene particularly vivid?
4. To what extent is the account of the adventures in Books 9–12 enhanced by being presented by Odysseus in a flashback?
5. How effectively does Homer make use of speeches in the *Odyssey*?

The content of this topic is more likely to be used in relation to another topic, than on its own. For example:

1. How effectively does Homer use speeches to portray character?

Further Reading

Barbara Graziosi, *Homer* (OUP, 2016), Chapter 4.
Jasper Griffin, *Homer: The Odyssey (Landmarks of World Literature)* (CUP, 2010)
Peter Jones, *Introduction to the translation of the* Odyssey *by Rieu* (Penguin, 1991)
Peter Jones, *Homer's Odyssey: A Companion to the Translation of Richmond Lattimore* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1989)
Ahuvia Kahane, 'The *Odyssey*', Chapter 7 in *Homer for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury, 2012)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

These questions have an emphasis on literary techniques and composition, but the answers require knowledge of other topics.

Passage A: *Odyssey* Book 12, 242–259

> My men turned pale with terror; and now, while all eyes were on Charybdis as the quarter from which we looked for disaster, Scylla snatched out of my ship the six strongest and ablest men. Glancing towards my ship, looking for my comrades, I saw their arms and legs dangling high in the air above my head. 'Odysseus!' they called out to me in their anguish. But it was the last time they used my name. For like an angler on a jutting point, who casts his bait to lure the little fishes below, dangles his long rod with its line protected by an ox-horn pipe, gets a bite, and whips his struggling catch to land, Scylla had whisked my comrades, struggling, up to the rocks. There she devoured them at her own door, shrieking and stretching out their hands to me in their last desperate throes. In all I have gone through as I explored the pathways of the seas, I have never had to witness a more pitiable sight than that.
>
> Trans: E. V. Rieu

AS Level

1 a. Why did Odysseus have to sail so close to Scylla? [2]
b. What is monstrous about Scylla's appearance? [2]

2. 'Odysseus' descriptions of the horrors on his journey are some of the most gripping passages in the *Odyssey*.' To what extent do you think this is true? Use the above passage as a starting point and your knowledge of Books 5–12 of the *Odyssey* in your answer. [16]

A Level

1. Evaluate how successfully Homer conveys the horror of this scene. [10]
2. It has been said that the *Odyssey* is the most influential story in western literature. To what extent does Homer's narrative technique engage the modern audience? [30]

2.2 The Heroic World: Characterisation and Themes

TOPIC OVERVIEW

- concept, values and behaviour of a hero, including the ideas of *timē* (honour) and *kleos* (reputation)
- how the different societies depicted in the *Odyssey* are characterised and portrayed
- characterisation of major and minor characters
- *nostos* (homecoming)
- disguise
- recognition
- fantasy and the supernatural

The following prescribed sources are covered in this topic:

- Homer, *Odyssey*, Books 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23

Remember that you will be given credit in the exam if you study extra sources and make relevant use of them in your answers.

This topic focuses on what makes a hero, including the ideas of reputation, honour and the importance of the journey home. It surveys the societies that form the world of the *Odyssey*, and the characters who inhabit them, and explores the themes of disguise and recognition.

THE CONCEPT, VALUES AND BEHAVIOUR OF A HERO

The hero

This component is called 'The World of the Hero'. What is a hero? Before we grapple with the definition of a Homeric hero, we might well look at what characteristics we would expect to find in a hero of today.

ACTIVITY

Research the term 'hero'. Bring examples of heroes to your class. They might be from current news stories, films, the theatre, literature, history, or sport or television programmes.

Try to build up the profile of a hero.

Does a hero have to be from a particular area of society or gender? Be famous? Be morally blameless? Do good acts for society? Have a particular appearance? Be admired by everyone? Act selflessly? How much is fame or being remembered after death an aspect of being a hero?

What makes a Homeric hero?

Noble birth

A noble birth is essential, and heroes are often referred to by a **patronymic**. A hero views his family as part of his heroic status: Achilles asks Odysseus about his father, whom he feels he should be protecting, and is concerned that his son should be gaining the glory due to a hero. Odysseus' status is affected by the actions of his son. When Athene sends Telemachus to visit Pylos and Sparta, it is partially so that he too can begin to build up his own *kleos*.

patronymic – the name of the father, given with, or instead of, the name of a character. For example, 'Odysseus, son of Laertes', or just 'son of Laertes'.

Relationships with immortals

Heroic individuals attract divine attention because of their qualities. Some divinities are supportive, but others may be hostile. The gods would not be interested in inferior beings, so divine aid is a mark of heroism, not weakness.

DEBATE

The question of what makes a hero in the world of Homer is a topic which scholars continue to discuss. If we are looking for the definition through examining the epics, then we have to bear in mind that they may not give a consistent picture, and that interpretations of the heroes vary. Odysseus is different from Achilles, and Aeneas, though he shares some of Achilles' qualities, is very much a Roman figure.

Kleos

A hero may choose a short, famed life over a longer life lived in obscurity. Odysseus chooses the challenge of returning to Ithaca over concealment with Calypso, even though she offers him immortality. Being talked about is an aim of the hero, because without *kleos*, heroic status is impossible. When Odysseus reveals himself to the Phaeacians, his announcement that the whole world knows of his fame is not unacceptable arrogance. It is establishing his *kleos*. A hero is a hero for as long as men talk about his exploits.

Physical strength and beauty

A physical appearance to match the nobility of the hero is essential, and Odysseus' 'broad shoulders and strong thighs' make lesser beings aware that they are in the presence of a hero.

Excellence in war

A hero's achievements and the resulting *kleos* often take place on the battlefield. Odysseus has already achieved heroic status fighting in Troy, and now, in the *Odyssey,* his battle is with witches, cannibals, monsters and finally his own wife's Suitors.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read Book 1 of the *Iliad* to see how fierce heroes are in protecting their *timē*.

Excellence with words

Excellence in arguing and winning with words is important for a hero, and is Odysseus' great skill.

Resourcefulness

A hero has physical skills, metal agility and a capacity to survive, drawing on his inner resources. He will not give up the challenge to face a difficult situation and win, and even looks for opportunities to prove his heroism.

Timē

Study question

Work through the criteria given, and assess to what extent Odysseus fits the description of a hero.

Timē is the valuing of a hero's achievement by public praise and honour. This valuing comes in the form of gifts, and a hero will measure his status by the number and value of the gifts he receives. In the *Odyssey*, the gifts are in the form of treasure. To the modern mind this attitude towards gifts may seem grasping, but to a Homeric hero gifts were a tangible measure of the glory owed to him. Public honour is crucial, and so a hero who feels that his reputation is being questioned will act to retrieve his honour.

Nostos

nostos – the journey home. The family, both past and future, is an integral part of the hero's make-up, and going back to them is a heroic ideal.

Nostos is important to some heroes. Athene remarks in Book 1 that Odysseus would give anything to see the smoke rising from his home. Every achievement he has on his journey home is part of his heroic goal and so adds to his heroic status. The ***nostos*** does not end when he reaches Ithaca, because ***nostos*** also implies recognition as master of the home and total possession of it.

FIGURE 27
The Greek artist Nikos Oikonomidis captures in this painting the image of a modern Odysseus longingly staring out to sea.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'There have been three common responses to the hero of the *Odyssey*. First, he is the loyal hero-husband, whose eyes are fixed on one goal only: return home . . . Second, he is the eternal wanderer, fired with a passion for knowledge and experience. Third, he is an anti-hero, a mean, selfish time-server who employs disguise and deceit often to gain the most disreputable ends (classical Greeks and Romans frequently saw him in this light).'

Peter Jones, Introduction to *Homer: The Odyssey*, translated by Rieu (Penguin, 1991)

Which description of Odysseus best fits your perception of him, and why?

EXAM TIP

Always be clear, if you are answering a question about a hero, about your definition of hero.

HOW THE DIFFERENT SOCIETIES IN THE *ODYSSEY* ARE CHARACTERISED AND PORTRAYED

Ithaca

Odysseus introduces Ithaca as a 'rough land', which 'nurtures fine men'. In Book 13, Athene talks of its resources, describing 'corn, wine, pasture for goats and cattle, timber and watering places that never fail'. Life is hard, but the people prosper. Eumaeus the swineherd gives us an insight into this rural landscape. He lives a half-day's walk from the city, which he has to visit in order to deliver his pigs.

The people have respect for divinities: their water supply is presided over by a shrine, and a cave on the shore is home to nymphs. The faithful servants in the palace have a

FIGURE 28
The modern island of Ithaca. Scholars debate as to whether this is indeed Odysseus' Ithaca.

S & C

For an appreciation, not of Ithaca itself, but of the importance of the return journey to a beloved home, read C.P. Cavafy's *Ithaca*.

S & C

'Homer's Greece of say 700 or 675 BC was an exciting place....

The spirit of discovery and innovation pervaded all of life, and fired the imagination.'

Betty Rubens and Oliver Taplin, *An Odyssey Round Odysseus* (BBC Books, 1989).

To what extent do you think discovery and innovation are the predominant themes in the *Odyssey*?

S & C

Read Book 2 of the *Odyssey* for an account of an assembly meeting in Ithaca.

deep respect for Zeus and the laws of *xenia* and supplication. Sacrifices and libations are daily activities. Even the Suitors are keen to get divine support: they employ Leodes to make their offerings and pray that Apollo will help in the contest of the bow.

Assemblies are held to discuss important matters. There is, however, little evidence in the *Odyssey* of them functioning effectively. In Book 11, Anticleia reassures her son that Telemachus attends public banquets, as is expected of him.

The palace is not described in detail, perhaps because showy wealth was not its main feature, as it was at Scherie. The action takes place in the main hall, and a courtyard is mentioned where there is an altar to Zeus and where a bed might be set up for a visitor. There are women's quarters upstairs, where they do their weaving, and we are told of well-stocked storerooms. Sturdy polished wooden doors provide security.

Social life in the palace is presented in terms of men (in the open courtyard) and women (indoors), and in terms of the loyal (Eumaeus, Eurynome, Eurycleia and Philoetius) and disloyal (Melanthius, Melantho and the twelve maids). Whether these people are freeborn or slaves is not stressed; their loyalty is their defining characteristic. Eumaeus and Eurycleia are slaves only through being captured, and their patronymics are given, indicating that they have not lost their inner nobility despite their slave status. Slave women were probably openly kept as concubines. Laertes' not sleeping with Eurycleia is mentioned, presumably because it was exceptional.

Life is not depicted as luxurious; Penelope weaves, along with the other women. Our narrow perspective on the palace shows dining as an important occupation, and one Suitor even brings his own servants to carve the meat. Those responsible for livestock are essential, and there are dung hills outside the palace. The manual work involved in farming, however, is not the work of heroes, and the suggestion that the beggar would be better suited to farm work provokes a strong reaction from Odysseus.

The society is patriarchal. Telemachus' attempts at pronouncing himself master and sending his mother upstairs is a prime example, as are references to Penelope going back to her father's house or her father choosing a husband for her. We do not know how powerful Penelope is, but her conversations with Odysseus show that she is certainly as cunning as he is. Had she been more assertive with the Suitors, of course, the story would have been different.

Twelve of the Suitors are from Ithaca. They are young men, and as Telemachus tells the people, 'These Suitors are actually the sons of those who are your leaders here' (Book 2, 51). The people seem to have accepted the Suitors' presence at the palace, and when Telemachus tries to get them to share his anger at the situation, they ignore his emotional speech and listen instead to Antinous. In Book 23, there is further evidence that these Suitors are an integral part of Ithacan society. Odysseus announces, 'We have killed the best of Ithaca's young men, the mainstay of our state' (Book 23, 115–122). Having arrived home and been recognised, he now has another challenge before he can settle peacefully in Ithaca.

Cyclopes

Odysseus as narrator describes the race of the Cyclopes before he relates his adventure with Polyphemus. He makes clear their lack of civilised ways: they have 'no assemblies

for the making of laws, nor any established legal codes, but live in hollow caverns'. They show no interest in their neighbours. Despite the fertility of the land, they do not grow crops; they do not build ships, and so have no contacts with other peoples.

The Phaeacians

The Phaeacians had once been the neighbours of the Cyclopes, who had taken advantage of their greater strength to ravage their land. Eventually the Phaeacians had fled to Scherie, a land far from ordinary people. They are not known in any other myths, and Homer may have invented the land as a bridge between the fantasy world of the travels and the reality of Ithaca. Nausicaa tells Odysseus that their land is remote, and they come into contact with no other people.

They are a stark contrast in their *xenia* to the Cyclopes and the Suitors, both of whom despise the laws of Zeus. Theirs is an idyllic country with flowing rivers and a constant supply of perfect fruit; the city is beautiful with its lavishly decorated palace, a meeting place with marble seats, and fine temples; their civilisation is refined, with banquets, a bard and elegant dancing. They do not have bows or quivers, but spend their time sailing. Their ships even guide themselves. The women are outstandingly skilled at the loom, and intelligent too. Their domestic life is harmonious, as shown by kindly Alcinous, his wool-making wife Arete, their godlike sons and the smart Nausicaa.

There are, however, reasons to question the utopian presentation of the country. Odysseus is warned to keep himself out of view because the people have little affection for strangers; they are great sailors, but have no contact with other peoples. Their temple is dedicated to Poseidon, the enemy of Odysseus. When Odysseus arrives as a suppliant, Alcinous has to be reminded that a suppliant should not be left sitting in the hearth. Arete insists that Odysseus secure his treasure lest the Phaeacian crew steal something, and Alcinous announces that the gifts will have to be paid for through a collection from the people.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'When Odysseus describes the Cyclops' island (Book 9, 131–6), he speaks with the discerning eye of the colonist. Odysseus the mythical explorer is related to the real-life Greeks who in the archaic age sailed into unknown waters across the Mediterranean and Black Sea.'

Edith Hall, *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey* (I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 75

Which aspects of Odysseus' adventures resonate with the idea of colonists exploring unknown territories?

S & C

'He refers to places far west of Greece which nothing in the plot of his epics requires him to mention. Once again he leaves us to guess about the range of his understanding.'

Robin Lane Fox, *Travelling Heroes, Greeks and their Myths in the Epic Age of Homer* (Penguin, 2008).

Read this book to explore the world encountered by travellers in Homer's world of myths.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Studies of the society in Ithaca can be found in:

M. I. Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (Penguin, 1972)

John Halverson, 'Social Order in the Odyssey', Chapter 12 of *Homer, Readings and Images*, eds Emlyn-Jones, Hardwick and Purkis (Duckworth, 1992).

Robin Osborne, 'Homer's Society', Chapter 13 in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Fowler (CUP, 2004)

CHARACTERISATION

Remembering the Characters

The number of characters in the *Odyssey*, and the frustrating similarity of the names of many of them, is perhaps the first challenge.

- Achilles
- Aeolus
- Agamemnon
- Ajax
- Alcinous
- Amphimedon
- Amphinomus
- Anticleia
- Antinous
- Antiphates
- Aphrodite
- Apollo
- Ares
- Arete
- Argus
- Athene
- Calypso
- Cicones
- Circe
- Clytaemnestra
- Clytoneus
- Demodocus
- Dymas' daughter
- Elpenor
- Eumaeus
- Euryalus
- Eurycleia
- Eurydamas
- Eurylochus
- Eurymachus
- Eurynome
- Halius
- Hephaestus
- Hermes
- Ino
- Irus
- Laertes
- Laestrygones
- Leodes
- Medon
- Melanthius
- Melantho
- Mentes
- Mentor
- Nausicaa
- Odysseus
- Orestes
- Penelope
- Phemius
- Philoetius
- Polyphemus
- Poseidon
- Scylla
- Sirens
- Teiresias
- Telemachus
- Zeus

You should eventually be able to identify all the characters named above.

Grouping characters is a good way of remembering what role they play in the epic, seeing their interactions with others and how they contribute to the overall themes and social, cultural and religious context of the *Odyssey*.

They can be grouped according to whether they are:

- mortal or immortal
- male or female
- human or fantastical
- isolated or part of a family
- helpful or unhelpful to Odysseus
- part of a story
- loyal or disloyal servants
- the dead.

They can also be grouped by those who:

- balance another character or episode in the *Odyssey*
- highlight particular aspects of Odysseus
- illustrate a major theme.

CLASSICAL LEGACY

Agamemnon, Clytaemnestra, Aegisthus, Orestes and Electra are the central characters in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, and Sophocles' and Euripides' versions of *Electra*. These plays are regularly performed today.

The *Odyssey* has inspired many films. For example, the Coen brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*

It is interesting to see how directors interpret stories. David Farr's play, *The Odyssey* (2004), portrayed Odysseus as a refugee arriving in a land dominated by the fear of illegal immigrants. Productions of the *Oresteia* have often drawn upon contemporary politics, for example the Vietnam, Bosnian or Gulf wars, and explored the reasons societies go to war.

Research a theatrical production or a film, and see how the classical material has been interpreted.

How to explain the importance of a character

The importance of characters can be assessed by asking the following questions:

- Are they essential to the plot? Could the events happen if they were not there?
- Are they an important means by which Homer can present the narrative?
- What do they contribute to our appreciation of Odysseus and the world of the hero?
- How do they relate to the themes of the *Odyssey*? Do they represent disguise, recognition, justice, loyalty or *xenia*, for example?
- Do they add to the drama, suspense, poetry and general enjoyment of the poem?

EXAM TIP

If an examination question asks about the importance of a character, make sure you do not start relating everything that character does.

Characterisation in Homer

Modern novels often contain passages of psychological analysis, where the author comments directly on what is going on in a character's mind. We do not find such analysis in the *Odyssey*. Homer focuses more on the dramatic impact of physical reactions and speeches. His characters are nevertheless vivid, memorable and credible.

Direct speech

More than half of the *Odyssey* is in the form of direct speech, and this is essential to the characterisation. Many of the conversations are in a domestic setting, and so we learn from them about family dynamics and relationships, as well as about the speaker.

A skilful bard would no doubt have a special voice for each character, making the performance into a sort of one-man show. (See page 85.)

Epithets

Epithets help the listener to focus on the essential features of a character. Penelope, for example, is wise; Odysseus resourceful; Alcinous is mighty. Giving the parentage (the patronymic) is traditional in epic, and is a sign that a character has some rank.

ACTIVITY

A classroom debate can help you develop a critical approach to the characters.

'This house believes that Penelope would have been better off without Odysseus.'

'This house believes that Odysseus' leadership of his crew could have been better.'

Make up more good subjects for debate.

When judging who has made the winning speech, look for the quality of the argument and the most detailed and relevant evidence from the text.

ACTIVITY

Draw a simple table on your computer:

Character	Book and line reference	Brief summary of content

Keep updating your grid as you read. It is not meant to give you the answers to questions, but if you complete it, you will have a very valuable document for finding references to the characters when you do have essays to write. The Penguin Rieu translation has useful page references for all the characters in the poem.

S & C The names that Homer gives his characters may be significant.

Research the possible meanings of Odysseus, Penelope, Telemachus, Eurycleia, Circe, Calypso, Arete, Nausicaa, Alcinous and Antinous.

Narrative voice

The character is sometimes presented by the impersonal narrator (Homer). The characters in Books 9–12 are all seen through Odysseus' eyes, since he is telling his tale to the Phaeacians – but can you believe a word that tricky character tells you? Might he just have made Polyphemus particularly cruel and monstrous in order to ingratiate himself with the Phaeacians and enhance his own reputation?

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Odysseus

Study question
Find all the similes relating to Odysseus. How do they add to the picture you have of him?

resourceful, great, wise, godlike, long-enduring, man of exploits, stalwart, favourite of Zeus, long-suffering, much-enduring, patient, noble, shrewd, sacker of cities, nimble-witted, of the many devices, heaven-born son of Laertes, the master-schemer, illustrious

In Book 1, we have Athene's image of him pining away on Calypso's island, the recollections of a fictitious Mentes, and Penelope's tears. Telemachus cannot even confirm that Odysseus is his father, there being no bond between them. Homer delays our meeting

with him until Book 5 where we see initially a broken man who can only sit and weep, yearning for Ithaca. What stops us dismissing him as pathetic is the knowledge that he is the plaything of the gods: a human who demands so much divine interest must be extraordinary! Although human, he is attractive, so much so that Calypso is willing to give him immortality in order to keep him. He is steadfastly devoted to his *nostos* and Penelope. He is cunning, refusing to believe Calypso until she has sworn that she is not tricking him. He is skilled and resourceful, having the ability, in four days to make himself a raft, from felling the trees to sewing the sail.

His cry during the storm, when he says that it would have been better to die in Troy, might seem defeatist, but it shows in fact concern for his *kleos*. Can he be a hero if his death is unwitnessed and unnoticed?

In Book 6 he needs help, but he is naked and disgusting after his days at sea. The only source of help is a well-brought-up young girl. The scene is like something out of a comedy show, as he emerges from the bushes like a fierce lion, but with a torn-off branch awkwardly concealing his private parts: we wonder how on earth he will manage to talk himself through that situation!

It is Odysseus' clever use of flattery and intuitive understanding of what might be in Nausicaa's mind that allows him to get what he needs. We become more and more aware of his ability to deceive, and this characteristic is exploited to the full during his time with the Phaeacians.

His task is to hide his identity until he is sure that the Phaeacians will take him back to Ithaca. His ability to deceive, a heroic quality in the context of the *Odyssey*, is exploited to the full. He dodges Arete's direct question about his identity, shrouds himself in mystery, and displays his heroic qualities when his honour is challenged. His sobbing at the stories about Troy is, perhaps, part of his cunning. Did he ask the bard to sing about his war exploits, just to give himself the right build-up for the revelation of his identity, and to secure gifts in recognition of his status? Or is the simile of his crying like a woman clinging to the body of her slaughtered husband as she is dragged off into slavery, a way for Homer to show us that he has been affected by the horror of war?

The story that follows is in Odysseus' own words, and he presents himself to the Phaeacians as he wants to be viewed. Any analysis of his character has to bear this filter in mind. He shows himself tending to the needs of his men and using his intelligence to get out of difficult situations. We might well have some questions. Is there nothing wrong in acting like pirates at Ismarus? Would it not have been better to avoid the cave of an obviously anti-social giant? If Odysseus had seen the potential danger in the Laestrygonians' harbour, should he not have warned the men? Would a loyal crew have defied their master and opened the bag of winds or insisted on staying on Thrinacie? Would a faithful husband have stayed with Circe for a year? He punishes the Cyclops for his lack of *xenia*, but is he not callous in mocking the blind giant, and is he not showing a lack of self-control in divulging his name? But these are questions we ask afterwards, not when we are in the middle of listening to tales of outwitting a monster, escaping cannibals or overcoming a beautiful witch.

His mother talks about her heartache for her 'glorious' son and for his wise and 'gentle' ways. Gentleness has not been an obvious quality in Odysseus to this point, but

S & C

'In Odysseus the Greeks had a glamorous hero and expert navigator: even on a humble raft, he can steer his route by the constellations. But Odysseus is a hero who also symbolises Greek intellectual prowess in other ways. He is inherently curious about the world and investigates interesting phenomena simply because he encounters them'.

Edith Hall, *The Ancient Greeks, Ten Ways they Shaped the Modern World* (Vintage, 2015).

To what extent do you think curiosity is an important aspect of Odysseus' character?

his tears at seeing her, and the pathos created by the image of his trying to throw his 'loving arms' around her and 'draw comfort' from some contact, allow us to see another side to the wily and unsentimental hero.

On his return to Ithaca, we see his ability to manipulate people and situations. He expresses his opinion about the Suitors before he has met them, with a clever 'I feel sure, my friend, that you will allow me to join in your discussion' (Book 16, 90). This gains him the confidence of Eumaeus, who refers to him as 'someone as shrewd as you' (Book 17, 271). As soon as he has made himself known to Telemachus, Odysseus starts to gather intelligence on the Suitors, asking his son, 'List them for me, one by one.' He manipulates Eumaeus into taking him to the palace at the time he wants to go. Once there he creates a public incident: he goads Antinous until he throws a stool at him. Odysseus then announces publicly that he too once had a 'rich house to live in' (Book 17, 420). News of this altercation, he will be aware, is bound to reach Penelope's ears. It does, and straight away she summons the beggar. Odysseus, wanting to manage the scenario, replies that he will see her later. This gives him time to test the Suitors a little more. He easily defeats the beggar Irus, and goads Eurymachus into throwing a stool at him. He cleverly ducks the stool, resulting in the wine-steward receiving the blow. This uproar is enough to cause Telemachus to send the Suitors home. Odysseus has thus given Penelope even more cause to see the Suitors as thoroughly despicable, and has ensured that his conversation with her will be undisturbed. She will be feeling unsettled, full of anticipation, and will welcome a conversation with this stranger who has had such an impact since his arrival.

In his interview with her, he proves the truth of his feigned identity by being able to describe what Odysseus was wearing. He mentions a gold brooch which Odysseus had. If, as has been suggested (D. Lateiner, *Sardonic Smile: Non-verbal Behavior in Homeric Epic*, University of Michigan, 1998), the image on it is 'quasi-erotic', then he is very cleverly stirring up her feelings.

His skill in manipulation is seen as well in the careful timing of his revealing his identity to Eumaeus and Philoetius.

During the battle with the Suitors, Odysseus displays his physical excellence with weapons – although, of course, Athene is on hand to ensure weapons hit their mark. His clever remarks to the Suitors show his skill with words, as he mocks his victims. We might feel that he has proved his superiority, and should be thinking about rebuilding society in Ithaca, not destroying its young noblemen. (See the discussion of justice and vengeance on p. 130.)

The image of him in Book 23, mediating between the cautious Penelope and impatient Telemachus, shows his patience, understanding and, again, perfect control – until, of course, his outrage that he might have been dishonoured by the dismantling of his bed causes him to fall into Penelope's trap!

FIGURE 29
Odysseus' dramatic escape from Polyphemus was a favourite subject for artists. This sixth-century bronze image was found in Delphi.

The range of his experiences means that we see him in many roles: he is hero, leader of his men, captive, master of his palace, husband, son and father. We get glimpses of his past through the stories of the bow and the scar, and of his future through the predictions of Teiresias. We see him through his own eyes, but also through those of Athene, his men, his wife and son, his slaves and his enemies (and his dog).

To sum him up is as complex as the *Odyssey* itself.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'The *Odyssey* draws from folk-tale traditions recorded primarily in art, but also offers a more disenchanted, epic exploration of power and its consequences. Just as it draws from several different genres and traditions, so it elicits a vast range of responses. By turns a comic character, a tragic hero, a stoic sage, and a villain, Odysseus could never, and cannot yet, be pinned down.'

Barbara Graziosi, *Homer* (OUP, 2016)

To what extent do you think that Odysseus' popularity is due to the difficulty we have in pinning him down?

EXPLORE FURTHER

To explore the continuing fascination with Odysseus and his travels, see:

Edith Hall, *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey* (I. B. Tauris, 2008)

Beaty Reubens and Oliver Taplin, *An Odyssey Round Odysseus* (BBC, 1989)

Telemachus

Books 1, 16–19, 21–23.

god-like youth, courteous, prudent, sensible, circumspect, thoughtful, cautious, great

Telemachus provides the impetus for the action in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus had told Penelope that she should remarry and leave his house if he had not returned by the time Telemachus had a beard on his chin – and at the beginning of Book 1 he is no longer a boy. The time has come for her to remarry, and so the race is on for Odysseus to get home before one of the Suitors is successful.

In Telemachus, Homer has to create a character who must be at least twenty years old, since he is the son of Odysseus. He must initially be weak enough to have let the Suitors take control, yet by the end, assertive enough to act when he has to support his father. His position with regard to *xenia* is established early in Book 1, where he is the perfect host to the disguised Athene, and embarrassed about the behaviour of the Suitors. The change from ineffectual boy to assertive young man is brought about by Athene. He tells her that he cannot say who his father is – not through any real doubts about his paternity, but, Homer is reminding us, because he has never had the role model who should have been there to shape his character. She tells him that he is no longer a child and should change his ways, and be as brave as Orestes. When Athene leaves, he realises that he has been in the presence of a goddess. This is another indication of his maturity into a son worthy of Odysseus, for immortals help only heroes, and Telemachus has been deemed worthy of a visit.

S & C Look at other mother/son relationships in literature: Anticleia and Odysseus in the *Odyssey*, Thetis and Achilles in the *Iliad*; Clytaemnestra and Orestes in Sophocles' or Euripides' *Electra*; Jocasta and Oedipus in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*; Venus and Aeneas in the *Aeneid* or Gertrude and Hamlet in *Hamlet*.

He shows his new-found boldness when Penelope comes downstairs to complain to Phemius. Telemachus reminds her curtly that Phemius should be free to choose what he sings about, and that she should be more resilient. He then dismisses her to get on with her weaving. The episode is repeated later on, but with more serious intent, when in Book 21 he sends her upstairs before she can witness the stringing of the bow and the slaughter in the hall.

The Suitors are on the receiving end of his assertiveness when he warns them that he will order them to leave the palace. This prompts a plot to kill him, and we see that his boldness has prepared the ground for the next level of conflict.

Book 1 ends touchingly with Telemachus being seen to bed by the ageing Eurycleia, who folds up his tunic for him and closes his bedroom door – a reminder, perhaps, that he is still something of a child.

In Book 15, having been protected by Athene, he returns safely from his travels. When asked by Eumaeus to take care of the beggar, he claims that he cannot, because he does not have the physical strength to cope with anyone who might want to fight with him. We see that though he has learned on his travels about his father's exploits, he is not yet ready to take on the heroic role himself.

After an emotional recognition scene with his father, Telemachus learns that he must succeed in a world in which Athene can at will make his father look like a beggar or a man richly dressed; where he must exercise all his self-control to be able to watch the beggar being maltreated; where he must pretend that Odysseus is not back, and be prepared to tell all sorts of stories in order to lull suspicions. These qualities of self-control and deception are the lessons he must learn if he is to be a hero, and are as important as the taking up of the sword. Telemachus soon begins to demonstrate that he has the makings of a hero: he advises his father on strategy, and then, when his ship arrives from Pylos, shows that collecting treasure is another heroic quality he has acquired. When Eumaeus later announces that he has seen a ship full of armed men entering the harbour, Telemachus, practising the skill of deception, knows that all he needs to do is glance at his father and smile. He shifts from being a victim of the Suitors to being a threat.

The bow is a challenge not only to the Suitors but to Telemachus as well. In demonstrating his own physical strength, he almost strings it himself, and it is only Odysseus shaking his head that prevents him ruining the whole plan. He is, however, masterly in asserting his authority when he sends his mother from the hall, and shouts loudly and menacingly to overrule the Suitors. He fights bravely, but certain incidents show that he still has things to learn. His killing of Amphinomus is awkward, since he cannot work out how to retrieve his much-needed spear from the corpse without making himself vulnerable, and his carelessness in leaving the door unlocked leads to the enemy obtaining weapons.

He is also tested when he persuades Odysseus to spare Medon and Phemius. In dealing with the maids and Melanthius, however, he has not yet learned to distinguish justice from vengeance. Although Odysseus' instructions are to execute the maids with swords, he hangs them, a much slower and more gruesome death. The punishment given to Melanthius, too, is barbaric: his nose, ears, hands and feet are cut off and his genitals are

CLASSICAL LEGACY

In 1922, James Joyce wrote a novel called *Ulysses* (another name for Odysseus). It is the story of an 'epic' day in Dublin, on which Stephen Dedalus, modelled on Telemachus, searches for his symbolic father and feels remorse for the death of his mother.

EXPLORE FURTHER

In Book 2 (lines 270–272), Athene has words of encouragement for Telemachus:

> 'Telemachus, you will be neither a coward nor a fool in the future, if your father's manly vigour has descended on you – and what a man he was in word and deed!'

Read Book 2 to see how he deals with the Suitors at the assembly, and Books 3 and 4 for his travels in search of news of Odysseus, and his return to Ithaca.

fed to the dogs. The Suitors get off lightly in comparison. Did his father endorse this punishment? Is this the act of a hero?

Telemachus in Book 23 has not learned the patience which characterises his parents. He petulantly accuses his mother of being cold-hearted for not accepting his father, adding the insult that she has always had a heart of stone. He does not perhaps appreciate the resilience she has had to demonstrate in order to ward off the Suitors. Odysseus understands that he still has to be tested, and diverts his son's attention by raising the question of how to deal with the aftermath of the slaughter. Telemachus' reply, either a witty retort or a mark of deference, is that the master of stratagems himself is the one to sort that one out, not his son.

Penelope

Book 1; Book 5, 215–221; Books 17–19, 21, 23.
Icarius' daughter, wary, reserved, radiant, wise, thoughtful, cautious, the noble queen, discreet, shrewd, alert, sensible, watchful, composed, loyal
(Note: NOT grieving, desperate, distraught, despairing, resigned or even doubtful or confused!)
Penelope's situation at the beginning provides an urgency which makes Odysseus' return not only a battle against the trials sent by Poseidon, but a race against time. The Suitors are getting impatient. We know, of course, that Odysseus will return, but the faintest possibility that he could arrive just too late adds excitement to the narrative.

She is the daughter of Icarius, who was the brother of Leda; hence she is a cousin of Clytaemnestra and Helen. She is not, then, just any old wife left at home: she herself comes from a family of heroic stature, closely related to women who are at the heart of the Trojan story. Helen deserted her husband, Clytaemnestra murdered hers. It is unlikely that a wife with such a pedigree will allow herself to take a passive role in relation to her husband. Athene observes to Telemachus in Book 1, 'With Penelope as your mother, I cannot think that your house is doomed to an inglorious future.'

She is portrayed throughout as the faithful wife weeping for her husband. Her fidelity is emphasised in Odysseus' encounter with Agamemnon whose treacherous wife, Clytaemnestra, took a lover and murdered her husband on his return from Troy.

Penelope is frequently portrayed as crying, but this is not to see her as weak – Odysseus and faithful Eumaeus, too, are seen freely giving way to tears when they are moved.

Penelope crying and going to sleep is a formula used with regularity, like the crew settling down to sleep after meat and mellow wine.

Through Homer's voice we get the public picture of Penelope. In Book 1 she draws a fold of her shining veil across her cheeks and stands by a pillar with her maids at either side. A little later she leaves, dismissed by her son who tells her to return to her apartment and get on with her weaving. But could that veil be concealing cunning plans rather than female modesty?

S & C For a story about Athene and weaving, see the story of Athene and Arachne in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* Book 6

A woman weaving is not necessarily a woman dominated by a man: the sound of a shuttle introduces both Calypso and Circe, and the supreme weaver is Athene herself. It is weaving which represents the first of Penelope's attempts to outwit the Suitors. As she recounts to the beggar, she had told the Suitors that she would marry one of them when she had finished weaving a shroud for Laertes. She wove during the day, but secretly unpicked her work by night. Spinning a yarn is, of course, Odysseus' special skill too, and it is the skilful weaving of the net by Hephaestus in the bard's song that catches out Ares and Aphrodite. The shroud trick having been revealed, it is natural that Penelope should apply her mind to weaving another delaying tactic.

She often expresses her distress at having to marry one of the Suitors, yet at the same time, their number and the intensity of their wooing are the source of her *kleos*. Penelope is shrewd and thoughtful, and as cunning as Odysseus. To what extent might she be hiding something?

We get the impression from Telemachus that she is on a knife-edge, debating whether or not she should remarry. In Book 1, Telemachus tells the disguised Athene that his mother cannot bring herself to reject all the Suitors or to marry one of them. When he has returned from his trip, the first thing he asks Eumaeus is whether his mother has remarried, and later he says that she is debating whether to stay at home out of respect for Odysseus or to go away with the Suitor who is the most generous with presents. He tells Odysseus (still disguised), the same thing that he had told Athene. How reliable is Telemachus' picture of his mother?

Athene tells Odysseus when he arrives in Ithaca that Penelope has been pining for him, and that although she has made promises to the Suitors in private messages, her real wishes are really different. Can we infer from this that Penelope is deceiving the Suitors, while thinking up some strategy?

Does she have a reason other than curiosity for meeting the beggar? She comments on how much of the household's wealth is being squandered by the Suitors, and before she meets him observes for herself that he is no fool. Does she think that she has found a potential ally?

Athene puts it into her mind to appear before the Suitors, with, Homer tells us, the intention of 'enhancing her value'. When Eurynome tells her that she should first wash away her tears, Penelope is reluctant to do so, preferring, it seems, to keep her tear-stained cheeks as a mark of her sorrow. Athene, however, has other ideas, sending her a restorative sleep, giving her a facial using Aphrodite's own divine cleanser and making her taller and fairer. Penelope cleverly capitalises on the effect that she has on the Suitors, manipulating them with a cunning worthy of Odysseus.

She admits to Eurymachus that she must enter into a marriage that she finds abhorrent. Does she speak genuinely here, or is she engaging in a delaying strategy? Given the tone

of her next words, it is tempting to believe it is the latter. She shows quick thinking in mocking the Suitors for consuming her food rather than providing banquets for her themselves. Then, when she goes on to challenge them to give her valuable presents, she shows a desire for acquiring treasure which is reminiscent of Odysseus himself. In withdrawing to her apartment laden with magnificent gifts, she makes a triumphant exit. Odysseus, who witnesses the whole interchange, certainly sees an admirable cunning in her words.

When Penelope comes down to meet the beggar, she is described as looking like Artemis or Aphrodite, one associated with chastity, the other with sexual love. Does Homer use this simile to underline the possibilities open to her? Will she remain faithful to Odysseus or remarry? Certainly she prays to Artemis for a sudden death, and it is Artemis, as archer, who will be her salvation in the bow challenge. On this occasion she comes down from her apartment, not to stand by a pillar at the sidelines, but to sit by the fire. Homer, with a sense of theatricality, sets this scene when Telemachus and most of the maids have departed. Melantho lingers, and both Odysseus and Penelope berate her, with Penelope echoing her husband's words in an act of unity. Eurynome brings a chair for Odysseus and the couple have the stage almost to themselves, illuminated by the firelight. Their unity is further emphasised by Odysseus' first comment, that Penelope enjoys fame throughout the world: she too has *kleos*. She now trusts him enough to spill out her sadness, and tell him that she has to devise tricks to deceive the Suitors. Having listened to his fictitious account of his identity, she considers him no longer a beggar to be pitied, but a guest.

Study question
What makes Odysseus and Penelope so well suited to each other?

Penelope lives up to her 'cautious' epithet and, with a cunning worthy of her husband, questions the beggar about Odysseus' clothes. Before she leaves him, she refers to his finding out whether she is indeed more 'intelligent' and 'resourceful' than other women; it is interesting that she chooses to focus on this aspect of her personality.

After the foot-washing it is bedtime, but Penelope raises one more question: she asks the beggar to interpret the dream she has had. The explanation for this could be simple: she has seen that he is wise, and hopes he will help.

Homer's description of Penelope collecting the bow is instructive. It is with a 'strong hand' that she picks up the 'well-made bronze' key. When she competently passes the key through the hole and shoots back the bolt with an accurate thrust, we get a picture of strength, confidence and a good eye, exactly the qualities that Odysseus will show when using the bow. When the doors fly open they make a sound like the roar of a bull, just as the Suitors will make when Athene raises her deadly aegis. When Penelope carries the bow into the hall, it is not in the way of a woman who fears that what she is holding is the instrument of her doom, but as a combatant with a weapon. She stands in her customary position by the pillar, draws her veil across her cheeks, but then, far from being passive, she issues a spirited challenge. Her words are aggressive: she berates the Suitors for being proud, condemns them for their endless eating and drinking, and then issues the challenge. She taunts them with the address of 'gallant' lords before placing in front of them the bow of 'godlike' Odysseus. After her powerful speech, she allows herself to be sent upstairs by her son.

DEBATE

Critics have suggested that the dream is a fabrication on the part of Penelope to prolong the conversation, or that it contains symbolic messages about her relationship with the Suitors and her willingness to keep them in the palace. As audience we are left to make our own decision, and there is no clear interpretation.

When later she has seen for herself that the Suitors are dead, Penelope is still alert to any trickery. Eurycleia tries to convince her of Odysseus' identity by telling her about the scar, and the impatient Telemachus complains that she is hard-hearted. But true to the epithet 'cautious', she has her own test for Odysseus. The bed test not only confirms his

FIGURE 30
Penelope with the Suitors, by Pinturicchio. It is the ambiguities in the character of Penelope that make her a subject of enduring interest.

identity, but also shows that she is equal to her husband in guile. Just as Odysseus provoked Eurymachus into an angry outburst, so she has provoked him.

The couple are perfectly matched in their cleverness, and also, as their time in bed reveals, in their love of stories. Not only is Penelope happy to hear about her husband's travels since Troy, but she is also keen to be told about his future ordeals. Even Odysseus is moved to comment on her desire to find out about more adventures. Why is she so accepting when, after an absence of twenty years, he announces that he is soon to leave her again?

One of the joys of studying the *Odyssey*, and the character of Penelope in particular, is that Homer does not tell his audience too much, and the character is open to conjecture. The Suitors are not really sure of her intentions, and neither can we be. There are those critics who, along with Telemachus, read her as an anxious woman on whom a terrible decision is being enforced. Others, using a more psychological interpretation, argue that she recognised the beggar from the outset, and is fully aware therefore that he will string the bow. Others are more cautious and claim that she knows subconsciously that he is Odysseus.

CLASSICAL LEGACY

The Penelopiad by Margaret Atwood rewrites the *Odyssey*, turning it into Penelope's story, and Carol Ann Duffy includes a poem entitled Penelope in *The World's Wife*.

Read them for a twentieth-century perspective.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Antinous complains to Telemachus: 'It is your own mother, that incomparable schemer, who is the culprit. Listen. For three whole years – in fact close on four – she has been leading us on, giving us all some grounds for hope, and in her private messages to each making promises that she has not the slightest intention of keeping' (Book 2, 88–94).

Can Penelope be blamed for what she does? Under what circumstances can lying and deception be justified?

ACTIVITY

Make a card to represent each major character in the *Odyssey*, adding the image of a celebrity to reflect the personality. Justify your choice to your class. Whom would you choose to represent that charming, handsome, clever, brave, boasting, vengeful, lying favourite-of-the-gods, Odysseus? Which public figures would you use to bring out the difference between the aggressive and brutal Antinous and the smooth-talking Eurymachus? And which Hollywood star has just the right balance of attractiveness and witchery to be Circe?

MINOR CHARACTERS

The crew

Books 9–12

If we are to believe the proem, the disasters that befall the crew are their own fault: the poet tells us that it was their own disobedience that caused their downfall since they slaughtered and ate the cattle of the sun god.

One asks, however, why their master had not asserted his authority, and stopped them landing on the sun god's island.

Sometimes the crew are the sensible party, such as when they beg Odysseus to leave the cave of the Cyclops. And it is they, not Odysseus, who realise that they should be leaving Circe if they are to get back to Ithaca.

Eurylochus is the only crew member who is seen acting independently, and in opposition to Odysseus. In Book 10 he is not so much wicked as irritating, as he refuses to return to Circe's palace and then changes his mind, not wanting to remain alone on the ship. A coward, he provides a good foil to the heroic Odysseus, who feels like lopping his head off there and then.

In Book 12, it is Eurylochus who proposes they beach the ships on Thrinacie – not a stupid suggestion, given the circumstances. His success in convincing Odysseus reflects perhaps not so badly on him, as on Odysseus himself, who had been warned by both Teiresias and Circe of the dangers of going to Thrinacie.

ACTIVITY

Imagine that unknown to Odysseus, Eurylochus has been telling the world about his experiences, and sharing his thoughts about Odysseus. Recreate his blog, up to the moment of the fatal storm in Book 12 when his iPad goes overboard.

Elpenor

Book 10, 552–560; Book 11, 51–57; Book 12, 9–14.

Elpenor has had too much to drink one night, and the next morning, jumps up, forgets that he is on the roof and falls head-first to his death. His soul goes to Hades and his body lies unburied.

The incident is very brief, but the character is memorable, and a stark contrast to Odysseus. Elpenor is the youngest of the crew, not much of a fighter, and none too bright either. He dies a death so unheroic that nobody seems even to have noticed: no *kleos* for him.

His death links Circe's palace in Books 10 and 12 with the visit to Hades, and gives an element of irony and even humour. Elpenor is left behind at Circe's palace when Odysseus sets out, yet arrives in Hades before his leader, prompting Odysseus to shout out that Elpenor has been faster on foot than he in his ship. There is further irony in Elpenor's request for his oar to be planted on his burial mound, for Teiresias will predict that Odysseus himself must go to a place where he will plant his oar in the earth prior to making an offering to Poseidon.

It seems unlikely that Odysseus would have left a body unburied, or that Circe would have ignored it. This discrepancy is one picked up by those critics who think that Book 11 is a later addition to the poem.

Calypso

Book 5.

the nymph of the plaited tresses, the powerful goddess child of the malevolent Atlas

Calypso keeps Odysseus on Ogygia for seven years, and thus Homer explains away a large proportion of the ten years Odysseus has been travelling, and covers the years Telemachus needs to grow up. We see only the last days of Odysseus' confinement, when Zeus orders his release. Her name is significant, meaning Concealer.

ACTIVITY

Compare Homer's description with Breughel's painting *The Fantastic Cave with Odysseus and Calypso*.

The detailed description of Calypso's cave gives the audience a clear setting for the action, like a stage set, and the rich vegetation with vines and fountains represents a magical natural world that the audience could only dream of. For some, the vine has mystical and erotic connotations. Like Circe, Calypso sings and weaves.

Calypso recognises Hermes immediately as a fellow god and serves him ambrosia. She also recognises her place in the divine hierarchy and knows she must obey Zeus' commands. This does not stop her from showing her indignation that the gods are forcing her to give up a man whose life she has saved. She does not, however, show her outrage to Odysseus, instead pretending that she herself has decided to let him go because of his unhappiness. When her offer of immortality is rejected, she provides Odysseus with his needs. He is suspicious, fearing that she is plotting mischief. She smiles at his reaction, stroking him and gently rebuking him for his cunning mind. She foreshadows the fond and indulgent, but slightly patronising, Athene in Book 13.

Although she is an immortal, Calypso is portrayed as a sensitive human, and our lasting impression of her is of a woman desperate to keep the man she loves. Once she knows he must leave, she provides good *xenia*: a meal, bath, clothes, provisions for the journey, transport and a following wind.

Ino

She is a nymph, and saves Odysseus at a time when Athene is reluctant to intervene for fear of upsetting Poseidon. Her advice is practical: she tells him to cast off the waterlogged clothes Calypso has given him, and instead gives him a veil as a 'buoyancy aid', one could say. The veil is a particularly feminine attribute, and reminds us of Penelope, who covers her head with a veil when she meets the Suitors. Is she hiding herself out of modesty, or like Ino, employing a powerful protective device to aid survival?

Study questions

1. How does Figure 31 differ from the story in the *Odyssey*?
2. Study Figure 32. What might Nausicaa be thinking?

The Phaeacians

Nausicaa

Book 6; Book 8, 457–469.

of the white arms

Nausicaa has been inspired in a dream to do her brothers' washing and start thinking about marriage. This is Athene's plan to get clothes to the naked Odysseus and ensure

that Nausicaa will not run away like a frightened girl. Nausicaa has a simple function in the story, but because of her characterisation, is much more than a plot device.

Details of her behaviour make her come alive. She approaches her father with the familiar 'Daddy dear . . .' and gets what she wants. She is too embarrassed to explain why she has a sudden interest in doing the washing, and her father does not pursue the matter. Once she has her wagon she is off, flicking the whip and confidently driving the mules to the river. Her feisty nature is seen again as she leads the girls in their ball-game and stands her ground when the naked Odysseus appears. His cunning words allay her fears and she tells him assertively about her country and *xenia*. Once he has washed and been beautified by Athene, she sees a potential husband before her, and says rather too much about the danger of the Phaeacians' thinking that she has found a husband.

FIGURES 31 and 32
Ancient and modern portraits of Nausicaa: right, behind Athena, looking at Odysseus, on an amphora from 440 BC (top) and in a painting by Frederic Leighton, *c.* 1878 (below).

Arete

Book 6, 303–315; Book 7, 53–77, 232–239; Book 8, 424–445; Book 11, 335–41; Book 13, 55–62.

white-armed

She is a descendant of Poseidon, and the people look upon her as goddess. We are told she is a wise woman and can settle even men's disputes. Both Nausicaa and Athene tell Odysseus to approach her first because once her support is secured, Alcinous will follow.

Like Circe, Calypso and Penelope, she is associated with weaving and sits in the hearth with her ladies, spinning purple yarn. But she is also a caring mother, who makes Nausicaa a picnic for her washing trip. Her role is within the family as loyal wife and mother.

Within the household she is powerful. She recognises the clothes Odysseus is wearing, and insists on an explanation. When he is leaving, the parting gifts are put at her feet, and she adds her own present, warning Odysseus to fasten the chest securely. It is to Arete that Odysseus makes his final speech, and she sends her serving women to accompany him to the ship.

Alcinous

Book 6, 57–74; Book 7; Book 8; Book 11, 341–353; Book 13, 1–69.

great-hearted, mighty, divinely inspired

Like his wife, Alcinous is descended from Poseidon, and is proud of his special relationship with the gods. When Odysseus arrives, he is pouring the customary bedtime libation to Hermes, and he goes on to order a libation to Zeus as god of suppliants, undertaking to return Odysseus to Ithaca.

ACTIVITY

Using what Nausicaa says and the actions of the Phaeacians in Books 6–13, produce a *Travellers' Guide to Xenia*, for both guests and hosts.

Study questions

1. Go through all Odysseus' words and actions in Book 8.
2. In what ways does he emerge as a hero in his own terms and those of the Phaeacians?
3. At what points might a modern audience not see him as heroic?
4. In modern literature or film, which hero comes closest to Odysseus and why?

Our overall impression of him is of a well-loved family man. He intuitively understands Nausicaa's reasons for the washing trip, and seems happy to be cajoled into letting her use a wagon. He is concerned for her happiness, and says he would be pleased to see her married to Odysseus. He sits next to Laodamas, his favourite son, and at the end of the day he retires with his wife, who shares his bed. His household is productive, with fifty maids engaged in weaving.

Homer portrays him as a good ruler: he is off to an early morning meeting when Nausicaa approaches him, and is quick to present Odysseus at the assembly. He has pride in the Phaeacians: he praises their key talents of feasting, dancing, music, clothes, baths and beds. He is diplomatic, suggesting games when he sees that the bard is upsetting his guest, and apologising for the behaviour of Euryalus.

He is generous towards Odysseus, but there are hints that he has had enough of his guest's secrecy. He tells him not to avoid answering his questions, but to be truthful. When in Book 11 he tells Odysseus that he does not perceive him as a liar, and says that he is as skilful as a bard in his storytelling, we might wonder whether he has doubts about the truth of Odysseus' fantastic tales.

Characters from Odysseus' story of his travels (the flashback)

Polyphemus

Book 9.

Odysseus is first aware of the Cyclopes when he hears their voices and the bleating of their sheep, and sees the smoke from their fires. He tells us that they are fierce, have no laws or assemblies, live in mountain caves and do not cultivate any crops. They are clearly barbarians, and the complete opposite of Odysseus' audience. Odysseus' reason for staying in the cave is to exchange gifts, and he has come prepared with some extra strong wine. Polyphemus dismisses *xenia* and suppliants, claiming that the Cyclopes are stronger than the gods, and care nothing for Zeus. When intoxicated, Polyphemus returns to the subject of gifts, and shows a cruel sense of humour, as he explains that his gift will be to eat Odysseus last. He is not clever enough, though, to detect Odysseus' lie about having lost his ship, nor to see through the cunning 'Nobody' name, or realise the fatal effects of the wine.

He is a monster, but at the same time a remarkably good housekeeper who has baskets full of the cheese he has produced, and keeps his lambs and kids secured in their own pens.

When the blinded Polyphemus groans with agony, Odysseus' remark that he laughed at the way he had tricked the giant perhaps reveals a callous side to Odysseus and highlights the monster's vulnerability. He is a pathetic sight, sitting in the cave entrance in excruciating pain, imagining that his favourite ram is grieving for him.

His rock-throwing provokes Odysseus into revealing his identity. Polyphemus is quick to act upon this knowledge, and he prays to Poseidon to make Odysseus lose all

FIGURE 33
This vase, painted soon after the time of Homer, shows the blinding of Polyphemus.

FIGURE 34
Nearly 3,000 years later, the Cyclops lives on in an amusement park in New York.

his ships and find trouble in his home. In a perversion of *xenia*, the guest receives his parting gift.

The gory detail of Polyphemus smashing men's heads on the floor until their brains run out and his vomiting wine mixed with men's flesh, or of Odysseus plunging the red-hot pole into his eye until it boils and sizzles, makes this a real horror story. The popularity of the Cyclops episode owes much to the strong visual possibilities of the drama. The blinding of the one-eyed monster and the escape under the sheep are favourite subjects for sculpture and vase-painting.

Study question
In what ways (if any) do the Cyclops and Odysseus resemble each other?

Study question
Why does the Cyclops appeal so much to our imagination?

Circe

Book 10; Book 12, 8–154.
the goddess with the lovely tresses, the lovely goddess, the glorious goddess, the beautiful goddess, the formidable goddess with beautiful hair and a woman's voice
The Circe episode provides a magical encounter with a witch in the fantastical stage of Odysseus' *nostos*, and acts as a device to foretell future events.

When Odysseus climbs a hill on Aeaea, he sees smoke. Fires should mean civilisation and the offering of *xenia* and roast meat. However, the first sign of the Cyclopes had been their fires, and wisps of smoke had been the first indication of the Laestrygonians. It is

not surprising, therefore, that the men collapse in tears at the mention of yet another wisp of smoke, and sob at the thought of having to pursue the unknown source of the fire.

Circe's presence, like Calypso's, is signalled by sounds of singing and the loom. However, Circe is different: whereas Calypso's home is a natural cavern with lush vegetation and swooping seabirds, Circe's is made of polished stone and is sinister. The 'wild' animals that Odysseus' men encounter are bewitched lions and wolves. These, Homer tells us, are victims of Circe's drugs. And so we know her game before the men even enter. No sooner have they accepted her hospitality than they are ushered into pigsties and fed acorns.

This part of the story of Circe is amusing and magical, and provides attractive subject matter for vase painters.

EXAM TIP

If you are asked to analyse the role of a character in the epic, do not give a character sketch. Instead, look at what the character contributes to the plot, relationships, themes and drama or atmosphere of the epic.

When we examine Homer's portrayal of Circe, we see some striking parallels with Penelope. Circe is a clever woman who uses trickery to manipulate her visitors. She weaves, and by her singing and the innocent sound of the loom, she lures men into her house. Penelope's weaving too is an instrument of her deceit, as she promises the Suitors that she will marry one of them once she has finished weaving the shroud. The setting for Circe's trickery, where she feeds the men her special mixture of cheese, barley and wine, carefully laced with her drug, is the banqueting hall. It is during the banquet too that the Suitors have to undergo Penelope's challenge of the bow.

There are similarities in the way the two women interact with Odysseus. Circe welcomes the stranger, and after much testing she recognises him and they go to bed. Penelope does the same.

Once Circe has realised that her guest is Odysseus, she plays the perfect hostess, providing him and his men with the customary bath, olive oil massage, new tunics and cloaks, and lavish amounts of meat and wine. Her *xenia* continues when Odysseus asks to leave, for she gives him a gift: information about the next stage of his journey, and the means to achieve it.

When telling him about his visit to Hades and meeting with Teiresias, she becomes much more goddess-like. She puts on a long silvery dress, a golden belt and a veil, and by the time Odysseus reaches the beach she has already slipped past him and tethered to his ship the ram and ewe that he will need for the rituals. When he returns, it is again her divine wisdom and guidance that are most in evidence. She provides much more help than Teiresias, telling him exactly how to survive the Sirens, get past Scylla and Charybdis, and avoid disaster on Thrinacie.

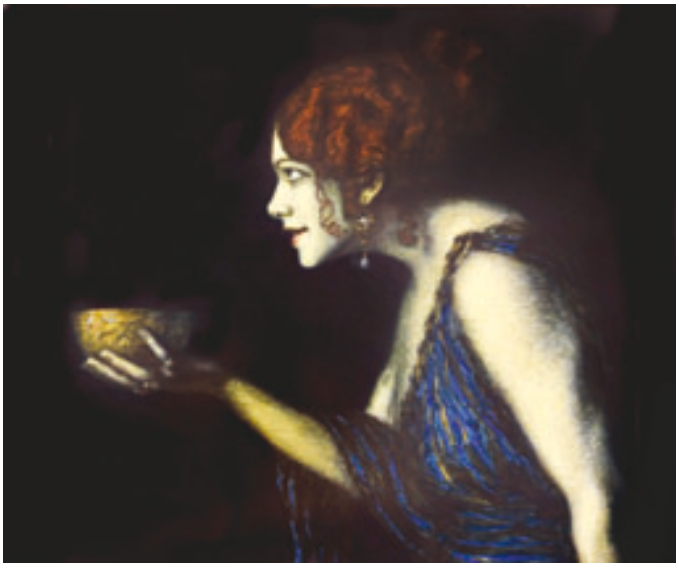


FIGURE 35
Franz von Stuck's painting 'The actress Tilla Durieux in the role of Circe', *c.* 1913. This modern image focuses on Circe's powers to allure.

Odysseus' crew have to remind him that he should be making his way to Ithaca.

What should we make of Odysseus' unfaithfulness? Circe is introduced as a formidable goddess, and in the ancient world it can only enhance the reputation of a hero to have a goddess wanting to take him to bed. Hermes gives him the perfect excuse for any love-making: he

actually instructs Odysseus, so our hero says, to accept Circe's favours, implying that it is his duty to do so if he wants to free his men.

Circe reflects well the themes of the *Odyssey*. She adds to Odysseus' heroic status. She is another supportive immortal who is on familiar terms with him: Athene teases him about his lying, and Circe calls him an obstinate fool. Disguise is part of her being. Not only does she disguise her witch-like character in the form of a human woman, but disguise (as pigs) is what she offers to the crew.

Characters in Ithaca

Eumaeus

Books 17, 21, 22.
the worthy swineherd, admirable swineherd, the master swineherd, the good swineherd
Eumaeus is the only character addressed directly by Homer, indicating perhaps that the poet has a particular affection for him.

Eumaeus is an important go-between. He takes:

- Penelope the message that Telemachus has returned
- Odysseus from his hut to the palace
- food from his farm to the Suitors
- messages between Penelope and the beggar
- the bow from Penelope to the Suitors and from the Suitors to the beggar.

He is the male counterpart of Eurycleia, another loyal slave at the centre of the household. Eumaeus calls Telemachus 'child', kisses his forehead and treats him like a father. At the banquet they sit together and make plans.

Like Eurycleia, Eumaeus is astute, and we sense that he has noticed something different about the beggar. He does not perhaps fully believe the stranger's stories, but is protective of him and discusses how he can best enter the palace. When Odysseus tells him he would rather talk to Penelope later in the day, Eumaeus describes his decision as good sense and defends it to Penelope.

Eumaeus is proud of his job and keen to do his best for the absent Odysseus. He is the opposite of Melanthius, and criticises his fellow worker for not looking after his herd properly. The callousness that Melanthius demonstrates means that we are not sorry for him when Eumaeus straps him to the plank, but the torturing and killing in Book 23 are perhaps not what we expect of our kindly swineherd.

Homer draws sympathy for him through his interactions with the Suitors in Book 21. They hate him, calling him the miserable swineherd or, mockingly, the distinguished swineherd. Eumaeus, however, does not hold back when Antinous insults him, telling him that although he may be nobly born, there is nothing noble in his speech, He goes on to show courage and loyalty when, defying the taunts of the Suitors, he hands the bow to Odysseus.

His loyalty to Odysseus is never in doubt, but Odysseus leaves it until the last moment to reveal his identity to him. Eumaeus' ignorance of the beggar's identity increases the dramatic irony throughout all the scenes with Odysseus and Telemachus.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read Book 15, lines 402–495 to find out about how Eumaeus came to be in Ithaca.

Read Book 14, which shows Eumaeus in his hut, showing *xenia* to the beggar.

Eurycleia

Book 1, 429–436; Books 17–19, 21–23.
faithful, sensible, good, shrewd, old, devoted

In Book 1, Homer tells us she is the daughter of Ops and granddaughter of Peisenor. Giving the patronymic, the names of her father, and the epithet 'faithful', is an indication of standing above what one would expect of a common servant. We are told that Laertes had treated her with respect when he had acquired her as a slave. She is referred to as the nurse – though she clearly has no children to look after – because to refer to her as a mere servant would diminish her importance in the household and in the narrative.

She had been the nurse of Odysseus and it was she who had put Penelope's baby on his grandfather's knee and told him to think of a name for the child. She had been the nurse of Telemachus, and is now his torchbearer. This gives her a perspective which goes beyond the twenty years' absence of Odysseus.

She is loyal and affectionate, and is the first in the palace to see Telemachus on his return. When he needs someone to keep the women out of the way while he and his father hide the weapons, he calls upon her. She locks the doors leading out of the main hall before the stringing of the bow, and later is called upon to bring sulphur to clean the pollution in the hall.

As nurse, she is plain-speaking with her ex-charges. The information that Telemachus is going to put the weapons away is greeted by an ironic quip: that it is a pity he doesn't protect all his possessions in the same way! Quickly she points out to him that if he sends all the maids away, he will not have them to carry the light. She alone can address Odysseus as 'my child', and after the slaughter she bossily tells him to put on some decent clothes.

When Odysseus agrees to having his feet washed, but only by an old and trusty servant, it is Eurycleia whom Penelope chooses, explaining that she is an old woman of 'great discretion'. Her discretion is tested straightaway when she alone recognises Odysseus. She remarks that no guest has ever reminded her of Odysseus as he does, in his appearance, the sound of his voice and even his feet, and so the audience anticipates the inevitable recognition. The realisation of his identity comes with a dramatic clang as she drops Odysseus' foot in the basin, thus drawing attention to a recognition which, if made public, could be fatal.

Her joyful elation is immediately quashed by a criticism, and this is a pattern which, through repetition, becomes comic. The audience warms to the well-meaning servant who never gets the praise she deserves. She foresees the importance of identifying the disloyal maids and offers to tell Odysseus who they are. He rejects her offer, but later, with no apologies, asks her to do the very job he had told her was not necessary! Her terrible 'clanger', a result of her overwhelming surprise and joy, causes Odysseus to threaten her with death. In Book 22, when she feels like shouting out with glee at the death of the Suitors, Odysseus rebukes her for triumphing over the dead. When she rushes to tell the good news to Penelope, chuckling and almost tripping over her own feet in her excitement, she is again told not to exult too soon.

CLASSICAL LEGACY

Consider the many similarities between Eurycleia and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Nanny McPhee, Mary Poppins and Maria in *The Sound of Music* also use their positions to help manage events in the household.

Eurynome

Book 17, 495; Book 18, 158–182; Book 19, 96–97; Book 23, 154, 289–295.
Eurynome is Penelope's housekeeper, and in many ways echoes Eurycleia. As Eurycleia tells Odysseus to put clean clothes on before meeting Penelope, so she tells Penelope to wash her tear-stained face before meeting the Suitors. Eurycleia washes Odysseus' feet when he first meets Penelope; Eurynome baths and clothes him before the long-awaited meeting in Book 23. In Book 1, Eurycleia lights the way to bed for Telemachus; in Book 23, Eurynome lights the way to bed for Odysseus and Penelope.

Melanthius (the goatherd) and Melantho

Melanthius: Book 17, 212–373; Book 21, 175–181, 265; 22, 135–479.
Melantho: Book 18, 321–339; Book 19, 65–95; Book 22, 461–473.
They are brother and sister, and represent the corruption in Odysseus' household. Melanthius socialises with the Suitors – Eurymachus particularly likes him – and he takes pleasure in insulting Eumaeus and the beggar. During the fighting, he is the one who finds his way to the weapon store and enables the Suitors to fight back. It is he who throws a stool at Odysseus, thus deserving personal revenge for his act of aggression against a hero.

Melantho is one of the disloyal servants and the mistress of Eurymachus. She insults the beggar, taunting him for coming to the palace. Her behaviour is particularly treacherous, as Penelope has brought her up as her own child.

Mentes, Medon and Mentor (not to be confused)

Mentes is the King of Taphians. Athene takes his form when she visits Telemachus in Book 1.

Medon is the herald and minstrel who has been forced into the service of the Suitors. In Book 17, 171, he calls the Suitors into dinner from their carefree playing with javelins, a small detail which contributes to the irony of their position. In Book 22, 354–380 he is found cowering under a chair, an almost comic figure among the slaughter, and is spared by Odysseus.

Mentor is a supporter of Telemachus. Athene appears in Book 22, 206–249 disguised as him.

The Suitors

Books 1, 16–18, 21, 22
There are 108 Suitors (Book 16, 240–259). Homer chooses to show in detail just a few of them, who have their own distinctive personalities. He introduces them in Book 1, when Athene witnesses their arrogance and greed. In Book 13, Odysseus returns, and their destruction is planned.

The success of Odysseus' plan relies on his remaining unrecognised in the palace, and the Suitors are fooled throughout. Their insults are more outrageous when pronounced in

front of the object of their scorn. Homer creates great irony when they pray that the gods might grant the beggar his dearest wish, or when they play happily with javelins before going to the fatal dinner, or woo Penelope in front of her husband.

They are the victims of Odysseus' deception when, having removed the weapons from the hall, he attacks them with his bow. But they are also victims of Penelope's deception. They force their presence on her and consume her wealth, but really have no grasp of how successful they are being with regard to their marriage bids. She habitually stands veiled in front of a column in the hall and in tears, the image of a helpless and frightened woman, and yet she is capable of tricking them with the shroud, berating them for their bad behaviour or extorting precious gifts from them. She is on the point of choosing one of them to be her husband, but each knows that he is incapable of passing the bow test.

The deaths of the majority of the Suitors are presented as the destruction of a mindless dehumanised group. They are like cattle pursued by a gadfly as they rush in panic through the hall, or like a shoal of expiring fish flapping desperately as they breathe their last. At the end, the corpses are piled up in the courtyard, while the final remains are unceremoniously scraped off the floor.

Antinous and Eurymachus are equally evil and their deaths are portrayed in gory detail. Amphinomus shows signs of conscience, but is killed all the same – unjustly, we might feel. Leodes pleads for his life, but Odysseus has already decided he is guilty. The innocent Phemius and Medon escape the slaughter through the intervention of Telemachus, but only by chance. Telemachus' observation that Medon might already have been killed draws attention to the indiscriminate killing that has gone on in the hall.

The line between justice and revenge is a fine one. It is clear throughout that the Suitors have offended Zeus and will pay the price to Zeus, but in human terms, Odysseus' behaviour could be interpreted as bloodthirsty and unjust. It is interesting that the most gruesome deaths are reserved for the palace traitors.

Antinous

Antinous is always the first to talk and is the first to be killed. He is openly hostile to Telemachus and proclaims that he hopes he will never be king. Penelope tackles him specifically for his attempt on Telemachus' life (Book 4) and calls him an arrogant and evil schemer. She reminds him that Odysseus had once saved his life, and it is sacrilegious to plot against his saviour. Antinous is therefore doubly deserving of Zeus' punishment.

When Eumaeus arrives at the banquet with the beggar, Antinous is aggressive and, further enraged by Odysseus' story, throws a stool at the beggar. At this, the other Suitors fear he might be doomed, Penelope hopes that Apollo will punish him, and Eurynome wishes for the Suitors' immediate deaths. He laughs gleefully at the prospect of watching a fight between Irus and the beggar, not understanding that the beggar's victory will be a prelude to his greater victory over all the Suitors.

He sneers at Eumaeus and Philoetius who are overcome with emotion when they see Odysseus' bow, calling them snivelling peasants, and has the audacity to blame them for upsetting Penelope. Knowing he is incapable of stringing the bow, he suggests that they

should postpone the challenge to the next day, when Apollo would chose the winner, and thus inadvertently he gives the beggar the opportunity to try his skill. Apollo does indeed choose the winner, and Antinous is shot through the neck before he realises what has happened. Just as a jet of insults issued from his mouth in life, so a thick jet of blood gushes from his nostrils as he dies.

Eurymachus

Eurymachus has the same evil intentions, but covers them in a more friendly exterior. He makes a reassuring speech to Telemachus in Book 1 and later tries to soothe Penelope by telling her that he would never harm her son. Homer sums him up: 'The words on his lips were soothing, but in his heart he wished for Telemachus' death.' He comes over as even more disreputable because of his friendships with the treacherous palace servants, Melanthius and Melantho. Penelope, however, is a match for him: when he flatters her looks, she points out that serious suitors give valuable presents. He cannot string the bow, and what distresses him most about his failure is not the loss of Penelope, but the loss of his reputation. Again Penelope shows her superiority with words, pointing out that he has no reputation to lose. When he sees that he is set to be Odysseus' next victim, again he tries to talk his way out of trouble, arguing that the now-dead Antinous was the ringleader, and trying to placate Odysseus with the promise of replacement cattle and gold. His death is a swift as that of his friend, this time the arrow entering the nipple and ending in the liver.

Amphinomus

Amphinomus is not so odious: Homer tells us that he is a man of honour, and that Penelope finds his conversation pleasant. He dissuades the Suitors from further attempts on Telemachus' life, wishes the beggar good luck, and warns of the perils of not respecting guests. Odysseus urges him to go home, and stirs his feeling of guilt. He nevertheless remains, and dies with Telemachus' spear stuck in his back. There is a certain awkwardness about this death, as there is in Homer's observation that even if he had admitted guilt and left the Suitors, he still would have been killed, as such was the will of the gods. Did he deserve to die?

DISGUISE

Disguise and deception work on many levels in the *Odyssey*.

We are told right from the first line that this is the story of a man of many resources, and Odysseus' main resource, which appears most often in the epithets, is his cunning: his ability to disguise his feelings, his reasons and his identity.

The primary purpose of his cunning is to survive, and to manipulate those around him into giving him what he needs to reach Ithaca. But as Athene rightly perceives when she meets Odysseus on his arrival home, he enjoys the intellectual challenge of trickery. 'You were always an obstinate, cunning and irrepressible intriguer,' she tells him.

Deception and disguise come in different forms:

- physical disguise in order to hide one's identity
- changes in physical form in order to manipulate the reaction of somebody else
- behaviour which has a hidden motive
- things said which are not true
- things not said
- word play and double meanings
- deliberate, calculated tricks
- stories
- dreams
- mind-changing substances
- physical hiding or concealment.

Why do characters use disguise?

- for self-preservation
- to manipulate the reactions of others
- to test others
- to test themselves
- to achieve a goal.

Study question
Choose three passages of about twenty-five lines each which best show the ability of Odysseus to be cunning.

ACTIVITY

Work through all the characters, mortal and immortal, making careful notes on who indulges in what disguise or deception and for what purpose. You might find a grid useful.

Character	Text/page reference	Nature of the disguise/deception	Reason	Consequences

Study question
Analyse Odysseus and Penelope in the context of deception. Who is cleverer at deception?

RECOGNITION

Nostos is not just the journey home, but the reoccupation once there. If the hero is not recognised and celebrated after his journey, then the *kleos* does not follow. There are two types of recognition scene: Odysseus is either recognised by accident, or he reveals himself.

The first recognition scene, after the Phaeacians have delivered Odysseus, is his own recognition of Ithaca. Athene has shrouded it in mist, in order (she says) to prevent him being put at risk before he has a strategy for destroying the Suitors. 'Whose country have I come to this time? Are they brutal savages . . .?' he asks in an echo of his words on the beach at Scherie. He fails to recognise that the young shepherd he is asking is in fact Athene, and the irony of his words 'I pray to you as I would a god' is not lost on the audience, who are in on the joke. He is being tricked, but when the trickster is Athene, then

it is a compliment! Athene choosing to play with him signals the playful intimacy which characterises their relationship in Book 13.

Athene, in an echo of Odysseus' long drawn-out disguise in Scherie does not answer his simple question: 'Where am I?' First there is a series of clues (what better game for Odysseus, the master of word-games) about how well known it is, its orientation, the terrain, agriculture, climate and natural resources. Finally she mentions the name Ithaca. What he has waited twenty years to see is in front of him, revealed – and yet his reaction is not to leap with joy, but to launch himself into a fictitious autobiography. We shall see the same pattern later on, when Odysseus finally reveals his identity to Penelope; this is met not with joy, but with a trick in the form of the bed test.

S & C Recognition scenes are common in drama. Look at the Orestes/Electra recognition scenes in Sophocles' and Euripides' versions of *Electra*.

By the end of her tale, Athene has transformed herself into a beautiful woman, and teases him for not recognising her. They behave rather like old friends with a history of playing practical jokes on each other. The recognition game over, they plot how Odysseus can regain his power in the palace.

The first recognition goes according to plan: there is a brief period during which Telemachus laments the absence of the very person he is speaking to, and then Athene gives the signal. Telemachus first reacts with disbelief on seeing Odysseus, but is finally convinced, and there is much sobbing with joy.

Odysseus has proof that his disguise is effective: Eumaeus has lamented his absence, but not recognised him. Telemachus has not recognised him until Athene's beautifying treatment.

The next two recognition scenes show that the disguise is not totally effective. Whereas many words have been used in previous recognitions, the one in Book 17 is signalled by nothing more than a wagging tail and dropped ears. Argus' master is home, his twenty-year waiting duties are over, and he can release himself to death. For Odysseus, all the emotion when faced with such dogged loyalty is expressed by a turning of the head and a tear brushed away. The brevity and understatement give this scene its extreme poignancy (or sentimentality).

The next recognition scene happens because Odysseus acts with uncharacteristic naivety. He refuses the offer of having his feet washed, unless Penelope can provide an 'old trusty woman'. The recognition comes in two phases: the observation from Eurycleia that she has never yet seen a stranger who has reminded her so much of Odysseus, and then the bowl-clattering recognition when she sees the scar. Odysseus then has to use desperate threats to silence her.

This recognition scene looks like an accident, but there is the possibility that cunning Odysseus is playing a risky game of double bluff by bringing about the recognition (why else ask for Eurycleia in everything except name?), knowing that he can use his old nurse's loyalty and goodwill to his advantage in preparing his revenge.

If the recognition scene with Eurycleia is hasty, the next, with Eumaeus and Philoetius, seems long overdue. Eumaeus has proved his loyalty by his open hatred of the Suitors and his fatherly care for Telemachus. However, it is not until the very moment before the challenge of the bow that Odysseus reveals his identity. Again, he has chosen his moment, leaving the men no time to betray accidentally their master's presence before the crucial challenge. It might be expected that a cry of recognition would go up from the Suitors the

moment the beggar strings the bow. Antinous, however, has not recognised the bow-stringer, and is reaching out for his gold cup when an arrow pierces him. Odysseus has a brief moment to reveal himself. He does so not by revealing his name, but by revealing the crimes they have committed against him: stealing his wealth, raping his maids and courting his wife. At the moment they recognise him, he pronounces their death sentence.

Homer has skilfully kept Penelope out of the way to this point, the better to give emphasis to the final recognition (that is, if we exclude Book 24, which is argued by some scholars to be a later addition). The *nostos* will be complete when he is reunited with Penelope.

The scene is carefully constructed. Eurycleia, bursting with excitement, is sent to bring Penelope the news. She is met with accusations of having being tricked by a god, and again with threats. Her relish in recounting the scene of bloody corpses is greeted again with the rebuke that she should not exult so soon. But Penelope seems partially swayed by Eurycleia's account of the scar. Thus the prelude to Penelope's recognising her husband brings together elements of previous scenes, making this the culmination of all previous recognitions.

Before Penelope finally embraces her husband, Homer focuses on family dynamics: Telemachus, who had shown reluctance to believe Odysseus in Book 16, now ironically chastises his mother for not believing. He is petulant, throwing insults in his frustration at his 'hard-hearted, unmotherly mother', and like a child is told 'leave your mother to put me to the proof'. He is given a job to distract him. With their son dismissed, Odysseus and Penelope are left alone for the final recognition. They are sitting in the firelight (the hearth has been a recurring image of home); Odysseus has been bathed by Eurycleia (as she had washed his feet earlier) and beautified by Athene (the same process as on the beach in Scherie), but still she refuses to recognise him. Odysseus calls her bluff by asking for a bed to be made up for himself, at which point one might expect her to fall into his arms. But Penelope now outwits him, as Athene had done in Book 13. She then provokes him, as Euryalus did in Book 8 and Eurymachus in Book 18, by giving him the test of the bed. Only after Odysseus has fallen into the trap does she acknowledge him.

Fantasy and the supernatural

Study question

'Although the *Odyssey* contains many fantastic elements, it is not a fairy tale, but an extraordinary poem for ordinary readers'.

Ahuvia Kahane, Homer, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury, 2012).

Is this a fair description of the *Odyssey*?

Fantasy enhances the epic. It:

- appeals to the imagination of those listening, as they have to create the images in their heads
- stirs up terror, giving the excitement of a horror film
- portrays a world beyond the experience of the audience, and may prompt questions. Does this fantasy world exist? Might it have been seen by travellers? There is perhaps here an element of the thrill of science fiction
- produces images of barbarian habits which perhaps unite Greeks in their civilised codes of behaviour
- enhances Odysseus' reputation as a hero as he takes on and survives these extreme dangers.

FIGURE 36
This 1891 portrayal by John William Waterhouse of the Sirens as sinister seductresses has been seen as a symbol of a subconscious fear in Victorian men of being entrapped by a passionate woman.

Books 9–13

The Cyclopes, Sirens, and Scylla and Charybdis are fantastic creations which inspired vase-painters and continue to appear in stories and art. Scylla (Book 12) has three rows of teeth, six heads and as many arms. The description of her devouring Odysseus' men is worthy of any horror film. But even this murderous monster has recognisable behaviour: she barks like a puppy and can be pacified only by her mother. Real sailors going through dangerous sea-ways such as the Straits of Messina perhaps felt more in control if they focused their fear on a flesh and blood being. The whirlpool literally swallows ships and so to give it the name Charybdis and develop a personality behind this voracious appetite for ships was a natural step.

The possibilities for reinterpreting Homer's creations make them attractive to study.

The fear of being imprisoned by a powerful woman is an explanation for the portrayal of Circe, both because of her sexual powers and her magic ability to inflict locked-in (a pig) syndrome.

The lotus eaters, of whom we are told nothing, apart from the effect of their diet, strike a chord with anyone who would like to escape to a world without worries. The modern term 'lotus-eater' means a person who indulges in pleasure and luxury.

The voice that lures men onto the rocks is omnipresent in folklore. Homer's Sirens seem just to collect men, and leave their strangely mummified remains in heaps. They have provided yet more scope for societies to interpret over the last 2,500 years.

The Phaeacians, too, live in a fantasy world: their ships pick up directions from the sailors' minds and sail themselves; gardens produce fruit whatever the season and the gods appear undisguised. Their society, however, is underpinned by Greek values: the family unit is strong; *xenia* is all-important; girls remove their headgear only when out of sight of men, and women weave. They are touchingly human: Nausicaa leaves her clothes all over the bedroom floor and has to get round her father to borrow the cart. And however much this is a fantasy land, Odysseus' gifts have to be paid for by a tax on the people.

The Cyclops too combines the familiar with the fantastic. His good housekeeping skills somehow make his appearance and cannibalistic behaviour more sinister.

S & C Decide on a historical period that interests you, and research any appearances of Homeric fantastical characters in art or literature.

S & C 'The Sirens' sweet song is a magical route to oblivion that underscores the dangerous power of words, especially in the hands of female singers'.

Ahuvia Kahane, *Homer, A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury, 2012).

Research women as source of danger in other myths.

FIGURE 37
A Roman wall-painting from the first century BC showing the Laestrygonians.

The Laestrygonians, from a fantasy land which knows no night time, do show some civilised behaviour: they have pathways, a palace and farming. The local chief's daughter, though, can respond only by pointing – a far move from the articulate Nausicaa – and they devour the men from eleven ships.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'Odyssean monsters which decorated Roman villas speak of a terrifying and distant past, which is reassuringly framed within an orderly architectural plan.'
Lilian Balensiefen, 2005, quoted by Barbara Graziosi in *A Companion to Classical Receptions*, ed. Lorna Hardwick and Christopher Stray (Wiley Blackwell, 2011)
What makes Homer's fantasies appeal to a modern audience?

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Modern scholars are not so quick to judge the characters as readers were in the past:

> 'Odysseus is a returned husband, long-missing and plausibly presumed dead; Leodes, among many others, desired his wife. Few of Homer's modern readers would condone revenge killing in such a context, let alone acclaim it, but the *Odyssey* does – or does it. . . .?'
>
> Michael Silk, 'The *Odyssey* and its Explorations' in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer*, ed. Fowler (CUP, 2004)

Is the *Odyssey* a tale of justice or revenge?

TOPIC REVIEW

1. To what extent do all the Suitors deserve what happens to them?
2. To what extent is Odysseus responsible for the deaths of his crew?
3. To what extent do you think Odysseus deserves to be called a hero?
4. How important are Nausicaa and Arete to the plot and themes of the *Odyssey*?
5. How important is Eurycleia to the plot and themes of the *Odyssey*?
6. How important is disguise to the success of the *Odyssey*?
7. What contributes more to the *Odyssey*, fantasy or realism?
8. To what extent are recognition scenes essential for the success of the *Odyssey*?

Further Reading

Frederick Ahl and Hanna Roisman, *The Odyssey Re-formed* (Cornell University Press, 1996)
J. Griffin, *Homer: The Odyssey (Landmarks of World Literature)* (CUP, 2010)
Ahuvia Kahane, 'Boundaries and social worlds', Chapter 8 in *Homer for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury, 2012)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Passage A: *Odyssey* Book 23, 85–103

As she spoke she left her room and made her way downstairs, a prey to indecision. Should she remain aloof as she questioned her husband, or go straight up to him and kiss his head and hands? When she had crossed the stone threshold into the hall, she sat down in the firelight by the wall, on the opposite side to Odysseus. He was sitting by one of the great columns with his eyes on the ground, waiting to see whether his good wife would say anything to him when she set eyes on him. For a long while Penelope sat there without a word, with bewilderment in her heart. As she gazed into his face, at times she saw a likeness to Odysseus, at others she failed to recognise him because of the vile clothes he was wearing. Then Telemachus spoke out and rebuked her.

'Mother,' he said, 'my hard-hearted, unmotherly mother, why do you keep your distance from my father like this? Why aren't you sitting at his side, talking and asking questions? No other woman would have had the perversity to hold out like this against a husband who had just returned to her in his native land after twenty wearisome years. But then your heart was always harder than flint.'

Trans: E. V. Rieu

AS Level

1. What piece of evidence has caused Penelope to go downstairs, and who gave it to her? [2]
2. How does Homer create a dramatic scene in these lines? Make four points and support each point with reference to the passage. [16]

A Level

1. How does Homer create tension in this scene? [10]
2. How far do you think that Telemachus was a son worthy of Odysseus? [30]

2.3 The Social, Cultural and Religious Context

TOPIC OVERVIEW

- power of fate
- role of the immortals
- relationship between immortals and mortals
- justice and revenge
- hospitality and guest friendship (*xenia*)
- family
- relationships between men and women, parents and children
- part played by women in the epic and their position in society
- role of slaves

The following prescribed sources are covered in this topic:

- Homer, *Odyssey*, Books 1, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23

Remember that you will be given credit in the exam if you study extra sources and make relevant use of them in your answers.

This section examines the moral and social obligations which affect the heroes, and their relationships with the immortals.

THE POWER OF FATE

The proem points out that it was the transgression of Odysseus' men that brought about their own doom, and a few lines later, Zeus tells the assembly that men blame the gods for their trouble, but in fact they bring about their own suffering.

Examples of men's responsibility are repeated throughout the poem. Odysseus remarks that Aeolus' gift of the bag of winds was doomed because of his and the crew's stupidity, and the Suitors are doomed to die because of their disregard for the laws of Zeus. Odysseus, sparing Phemius and Medon, tells them that it is always a much better policy to do right than wrong. They have determined their own fate.

There is an underpinning sense that Zeus, or fate, is not to be interfered with. When Athene is talking to Telemachus in Book 1, imagining a triumphant return of Odysseus, she adds that, of course, the gods will decide whether or not he is to return to the palace. When Aeolus sees that his gift has not been effective, he says that Odysseus must be detested by the gods, and shuns him, as though to give him another bag would be putting up a challenge to Zeus. Similarly, Alcinous says that they will happily safeguard Odysseus until he is on his own land – thereafter he will have to suffer whatever destiny has in store for him.

THE IMMORTALS

Mount Olympus is remote, in cloudless air, unaffected by wind, rain or snow. The immortals mirror the humans as they meet in assemblies, and they have their own strict hierarchy: Athene will not challenge Poseidon, Poseidon consults with Zeus before punishing the Phaeacians; Hermes knows he has to obey Zeus, and Calypso, albeit reluctantly, follows Zeus' commands. They bargain with each other: the sun god threatens to withdraw to the underworld if Zeus will not agree to destroy Odysseus' ship. Calypso is a lesser power, and 'only' a woman. She is outraged by the double standards on Olympus whereby a god can take mortal lovers with impunity, but a goddess is invariably deprived of the object of her affections. If we are to believe Demodocus' song, the males enjoy a good laugh at Ares' and Aphrodite's expense, while the females stay at home.

THE ROLE OF THE IMMORTALS

Zeus in his supreme position as ruler of Olympus and protector of suppliants is never far away, but it is Athene and Poseidon who take major roles in the plot, she as supporter of Odysseus, he as enemy.

- Their actions shape the story: Zeus agrees to the release of Odysseus, leading to his return to Ithaca; Athene protects Odysseus from his release to his reunion with Penelope; Poseidon sends the trials on his journey.
- They reveal the heroic nature of Odysseus.
- They provide justice, but also gleeful vengeance if they have been thwarted.
- They add to the fantasy and can, at whim, do what they want, providing tension and surprise.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IMMORTALS AND MORTALS

The gods communicate with mortals via omens and dreams, and sometimes in person. They come undisguised to the Phaeacians, according to Alcinous, but elsewhere

they take on a different identity before mortals. Zeus never appears: he sends Hermes to deliver his messages. When gods are visible, they are characterised by light, beauty and speed of movement. Only heroes can recognise them, and Telemachus' realisation in Book 1 that his visitor is an immortal is a sure sign that he is a hero in the making.

In mortal eyes, the gods are associated with punishment and fear. The Suitors warn Antinous that the beggar could be a god; Penelope's first reaction is that the Suitors have been killed by an outraged immortal; Telemachus fears that Odysseus might be a divine power playing a trick on him; and Odysseus is suspicious of Ino. Anything unexpected could be the work of a god. Fear prompts men to seek the gods' approval. Amphinomus, for example, urges that the will of the gods be ascertained before any attempt on the life of Telemachus.

The gods like sacrifices: Hermes complains that, having flown over the sea for so long, he has not enjoyed any offerings. Humans use sacrifices as a way to gain favour. Eumaeus prays that Zeus will repay Odysseus for all his offerings, and on Thrinacie, the men hope to appease the god by a sacrifice.

Zeus

Book 1, 25–80; Book 5, 1–42, 112–115; Book 12, 312–419; Book 13, 125–158; Book 21, 413–415.

the thunderer, patron of suppliants, gatherer of the clouds, Olympian, father of men and gods, son of Chronos, lord of the black cloud, almighty

Zeus' role is much greater than his interventions the plot. He is the first speaker in the poem, and the point he makes underpins the *Odyssey*: men blame the gods for their troubles, but are themselves responsible for what happens. He considers as an example Aegisthus, who, despite warnings, murdered his cousin Agamemnon and then married Clytaemnestra, Agamemnon's wife.

Much of the *Odyssey* revolves around the treatment of suppliants and guests, and Nausicaa tells Odysseus that all strangers and beggars are under the protection of Zeus. Polyphemus, however, claims that the Cyclopes care nothing for Zeus and are stronger than the gods. The final slaughter of the Suitors is not presented as punishment for having lusted after Penelope, but for having disregarded the laws of Zeus. Odysseus tells Eurycleia as much when she wants to cry out in triumph at what she sees as Odysseus' victory.

Athene

Book 1; Book 5, 1–25, 108–109, 381–388, 425–438; 474–493; Book 6, 1–47, 110–140, 230–237, 321–331; Book 7, 14–80, 110; Book 8, 8–15, 193–200; Book 13, 190–440; Book 16, 154–178; Book 17, 63–64, 360–364; Book 18, 71, 158–200, 346–348; Book 19, 479; Book 21, 1–4, 357; Book 22; Book 23, 152–164, 242, 344, 370.

the goddess of the flashing eyes, bright eyed, of the lovely hair, the clever strategist, the warrior goddess

Athene plays an important role from Book 1, where she secures Zeus' approval for Odysseus' release from Calypso, and then visits Telemachus. She thus links Olympus, Odysseus and Ithaca.

Although she is not present during the flashback episodes, her presence is felt in the Phaeacia books (6–9). She provides Odysseus with the olive-bush bed, clothes via Nausicaa, directions to the palace, an audience in the assembly and witnesses to his winning discus shot.

When Athene meets Odysseus in Book 13, she engages with him almost as if talking to an equal. She appears as a shepherd boy (though one wonders whether her sandals and glistening feet are meant to be a clue to the dazed Odysseus, who kneels before her). When he asks where he is, she says he must be a simpleton not to know. Only she could address him thus and not get a hostile, indignant response! Athene lets him finish his lying tale and, now a tall, beautiful woman, she teasingly caresses him with her hand and mocks him for being a trickster who cannot resist making up stories. From this point, the two act like partners in crime, delighting in their talent for ingenuity and ready to embark upon a cunning scheme to defeat the Suitors. Athene helps Penelope as well as Odysseus, prompting her to action, beautifying her or sending her to sleep as needed. We come to see her as a kindly presence.

There is nothing of the light-hearted goddess, however, in the scene of slaughter, as 'ghastly screams rose up as men's heads were smashed in, and the floor ran with blood' (Book 22, 308).

Study questions
For Athene, find:

- five disguises
- five examples of her inspiring mortals to carry out an action
- five ways she helps out in difficult circumstances
- five examples of her changing a mortal's appearance.

Poseidon

Book 1, 20, 68–75; Book 5, 282–290, 375–380; Book 8, 564–571; Book 9, 526–536; Book 11, 100–103; Book 13, 125–187, 341–343.

Sustainer of the earth, the earth-shaker, master of the sea

In answer to Polyphemus' call for revenge, Poseidon has undertaken to pursue Odysseus. In his attempt to stop him getting to Scherie, he sends a storm which wrecks his boat, and it is only thanks to the intervention of Ino and Athene that Odysseus lands safely.

The Phaeacians are descended from Poseidon and so are skilled sea-farers. They pride themselves on taking travellers home on their swift ships, and naturally will take Odysseus back to Ithaca. While Poseidon cannot stop them helping him, he can exercise his power over them, and as they return from Ithaca their ship is turned to stone, leaving the Phaeacians in fear, hoping that a sacrifice of twelve bulls will placate him. Do they deserve their punishment?

Hermes

Book 5, 28–196; Book 10, 273–309.

the giant killer, the messenger, of the golden wand

Hermes appears twice: he is sent by Zeus to tell Calypso to let Odysseus leave, and he gives Odysseus the flower moly, which acts as an antidote to Circe's drugs.

Apollo

Book 17, 491–494; Book 21, 255–280.
Apollo does not appear in the *Odyssey*, but is implicated in Odysseus' victories. A priest of Apollo had given him the wine which makes Polyphemus drunk, and as god of archery, he is linked to the bow contest. Penelope, hearing that the beggar has been assaulted, exclaims to Antinous, 'I hope the Archer Apollo strikes you as you struck him!' Antinous comments that the day of the challenge is 'a public holiday in honour of the god', and suggests that Melanthius should bring in the best goats, so that they can sacrifice the thigh bones to 'the great Archer'. He looks forward to Apollo granting his favourite the strength to win – as Apollo soon does!

JUSTICE AND REVENGE

Study questions

1. In the *Odyssey*, there is much punishment, but is it justice or revenge?
2. Do some crimes go unpunished?

ACTIVITY

Imagine that Minos is sitting as judge in the Court of Appeal in Hades. All the characters who have been killed in Book 22 are appealing against their punishment. Odysseus and Telemachus are defending their actions, and Penelope, Eurycleia and Eumaeus can be called as witnesses. Get into role, compose your speech and aim to convince Minos of your cause.

There is much talk of justice. Zeus says that men should accept the consequences of their actions.

However, he also tells Poseidon that 'as for mankind, if anyone in the pride of his power treats you with disrespect, you have all the future in which to take your revenge'. It seems that a god has every right to act in pure revenge against a mortal who has offended him.

Odysseus' goal is to punish the Suitors. Although it is established that he is acting as agent of Zeus, he shows signs of delighting in personal revenge as he kills them. We may feel some sympathy for Amphinomus, who, like a hero from Greek tragedy, failed to listen to his conscience and was slaughtered with the others.

Telemachus, told to use his sword to kill the disloyal maids, goes against his father's order, saying he will not give a 'decent death' to those who have insulted him and his mother, and slept with the Suitors. His hanging them instead, the cruelty reinforced by the thrush simile, and the slicing off of the nose, ears and genitals of Melanthius, seem to be acts of cruelty, not justice. Their crime was not disobeying Zeus, the crime of the Suitors, but disloyalty to a man, and their punishment was much more vicious.

HOSPITALITY AND GUEST FRIENDSHIP (*XENIA*)

Xenia is a reciprocal agreement between host and guest. This code of behaviour was seen as a law sacred to Zeus. To harm your host or guest was to harm Zeus himself, and the consequences of violating *xenia* were dire.

Xenia is at the heart of the *Odyssey*. Paris violates the sacred rules when he is a guest of King Menelaus of Sparta. He steals Helen, his wife, and sets in motion the Trojan War. The Suitors, too, violate *xenia*, since they receive hospitality, but give nothing in return.

Nearly every encounter in the *Odyssey* is constructed around *xenia*. The stranger arrives, and as a sacred guest, is welcomed and offered food, drink, a bath and a bed. No enquiries are made as to his identity until these needs have been satisfied. To pay back the host, the

guest provides a gift. Since the guest is probably without resources, the gift can be a story. In a world where contact with outsiders is limited, a story is a very valuable gift. When the traveller leaves, the host gives him a bath, clothes and what is needed for the journey.

Study questions

1 What formulaic phrases are used to describe the acts of *xenia*?
2 Which hosts fail to follow the rules, and what are the consequences?

THE FAMILY

Families are at the heart of the *Odyssey,* from the gods on Olympus, to the households Odysseus meets on his journey, from the fantastical Phaeacians to Odysseus' own family in Ithaca.

Family relationships influence the actions of the gods. Athene asks her father to release Odysseus only when her uncle is safely out of the way, and Poseidon punishes Odysseus because of a prayer from his son.

Aeolus, a minor god, is presented as a family man who happily spends the whole time in banquets with his family. His six sons are married to his six daughters.

Even the most monstrous beings Odysseus encounters are seen within a family context. The Cyclops calls upon his father, Scylla is calmed by her mother, Cratais, and the cannibal Antiphates has a daughter.

The Sirens are presented as little more than voices, but the effect they have is presented with reference to families, for the man who hears them 'will receive no welcome from his wife or children'.

The Phaeacian royal household is presented as a close-knit family. There are hints that Arete is the person who makes the decisions – both Nausicaa and Athene tell Odysseus as much. The sons are the pride and joy of Alcinous, who proudly watches them display their athletic and dancing skills. In this family it is these skills, not war, which win them renown.

We see nothing of Odysseus with his family at the beginning of the Odyssey – his alienation from them and consequent *nostos* being the point of his adventures. On his visit to the Land of the Dead, we see him with his mother. There is great pathos as he tries three times to clasp her, and her shade slips through his hands, leaving him 'pierced' by a sharp pain. The family is a strong unit in the palace of Ithaca. Penelope and Telemachus are viewed in the context of the whole household. Eurycleia was nurse to both Odysseus and Telemachus, and she remains Penelope's main support. Melantho was brought up by Penelope as a daughter and even given toys, making her behaviour even more treacherous. We are given little information about what has happened in the family during Odysseus' wanderings. The narrative requires Telemachus to have been ineffectual and Penelope not to have given in to the Suitors. Now Telemachus has come of age, he is assuming his role in the family, telling his mother what to do until the return of the head of the household.

ACTIVITY

List all Odysseus' hosts on his journey. Mark each one out of ten for *xenia*, explaining the reasons for the score you have given.

ACTIVITY

Go through Books 16–19 and 21, listing all the ways the Suitors break the laws of *xenia*.

RELATIONSHIPS: MEN AND WOMEN

Relationships between men and women are crucial to the *Odyssey*: Odysseus has fought in a war waged to reclaim Helen, Menelaus' wife, and he is now returning to Ithaca is to reclaim his own wife, Penelope.

S & C

Read about Baucis and Philemon in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for a *xenia* story written in Roman times (*Metamorphoses* VIII, 621–696).

For a broader picture of the world in which *xenia* is so important, see Moses Finley, *The World of Odysseus* (Penguin, 1994).

The question of the woman's fidelity is central to the epic. At the beginning of Book 1, Zeus relates the story of Clytaemnestra's affair with Aegisthus and her husband Agamemnon's homecoming. Book 11 shows us women whose marriages have deviated from the ideal. The survey includes Tyro, raped by Poseidon; Alcmeme, seduced by Zeus disguised as her husband; Epicaste (Jocasta), who unwittingly married her own son; Phaedra, who fell in love with her step-son; and Eriphile, who bartered her husband's life for gold. It is as though Odysseus is observing the scenarios which could threaten his relationship with Penelope. Agamemnon in Hades recalls the treachery of Clytaemnestra. 'Never be too trustful even of your wife,' he warns, before adding, 'Not that your wife, Odysseus, will ever murder you.'

The man's fidelity is generally not an issue: Agamemnon shows no indication that his returning home with a mistress should have any bearing on Clytaemnestra's behaviour; Odysseus' sleeping with Calypso for seven years and Circe for one year, is not raised as a moral problem. That women are possessions of men seems to be accepted. Eurymedusa was given to Alcinous as a prize, and the women of the Cicones (Book 9, 41), are presented as provisions for the men along with the food and wine.

Laertes' treatment of Eurycleia does show some sensitivity: he had bought her for the price of twenty oxen (Book 1, 430), but for fear of his wife's displeasure he had not slept with her.

The husbands and wives have close relationships, based on affection and mutual respect. The closeness of the couples is reflected in their retiring at the end of the day to their bed, in the case of Odysseus and Penelope, to a bed which is constructed so as to be impossible to move. The women Odysseus meets are attracted to him: Calypso keeps him for seven years, Circe for a year; Nausicaa enjoys her dreams of him as potential husband for just one day. These women, in love though they may be, are powerful, and Odysseus relies on them for the next stage in his *nostos*. They might be disappointed at his departure, but they remain strong: Calypso sees him off with provisions, Circe with valuable advice, and Nausicaa establishes that she has her part in his story and demands recognition for it.

Odysseus' relationship with Athene can never be a normal one, she being a goddess and, what's more, one who is devoted to chastity. However, in Book 13 she teases him about where he is, sees through his lying tales, and laughs with him about the way they are both the best at deception. This closeness based on affection and shared intelligence is not dissimilar to his relationship with Penelope.

ACTIVITY

Within marriage we see women as 'domestic yet empowered' (Nancy Felson and Laura Slatkin, 'Gender and Homeric Epic', in *The Cambridge Companion to Homer,* ed. Fowler, CUP, 2004).

Illustrate this statement with reference to Penelope and Arete.

RELATIONSHIPS: PARENTS AND CHILDREN

The relationships are discussed above in the context of the family; they are given more fully with the characters on pp. 100–112.

The relationship between Telemachus and his parents:

- acts as a pivot to the plot. For Penelope, his coming of age is cue for remarrying, and for Odysseus, an adult son means an ally against the Suitors

- gives another perspective on Penelope. She has to readjust to a son who is beginning to assert his male authority, and he is in the position of giving instructions to a woman who is much cleverer than he is.

Relationships between fathers and sons underline the cross-generational aspect of heroism and obligations:

- Telemachus learns from Odysseus how to be a hero.
- Antinous' father was saved by Odysseus (Book 16, 424), and so Antinous' behaviour is doubly reprehensible.
- Amphinomus is reminded that his father had a reputation for being good (Book 18, 119), and that he should try to emulate him.
- The miserable Achilles in Hades rejoices in the news of his son's renown (Book 11, 539).
- When called upon by Polyphemus, Poseidon avenges the wrong done to his son.
- Orestes avenges the murder of his father, Agamemnon.

THE PART PLAYED BY WOMEN IN THE EPIC AND THEIR POSITION IN SOCIETY

We cannot know to what extent the women in the *Odyssey* mirror those in Mycenaean society or in Homer's life. Our examination can be only of the society Homer has created in his epic, not of historical realities.

Social order is one of the main themes of the *Odyssey,* and so we can expect women to be important. Odysseus' purpose is to return to his wife and restore order in Ithaca.

Marriage is a fundamental part of that social order and requires women to be partners: Odysseus asks his mother whether Penelope is keeping their estate safe. Clearly he judges her to have the capability to manage affairs in his absence. He is delighted when he witnesses her attempt to extort valuable gifts from the Suitors, and is patient at her caution in acknowledging his identity. Alcinous' wife Arete appears an equal in looking after the household. Sexual fidelity is essential. Penelope is portrayed as on the verge of remarrying, and some interpret her dream as revealing her attraction towards the Suitors. The maids who have become mistresses to the Suitors get the cruellest punishments.

Weaving is part of the women's role in the household – even Calypso and Circe conform to this female role. It contains them in the women's quarters of the house, the hall and courtyard being the domain of the men, but it also provides the rich cloaks and covers which are highly valued and markers of wealth.

The women's role may be in the domestic sphere, but that does not limit the power they have over events. Arete is presented as having the most authoritative voice among the Phaeacians, and Penelope is the immediate cause of the Suitors' actions in Ithaca. Without Calypso, Circe and Nausicaa, Odysseus' *nostos* would be different, and the *Odyssey* would be deprived of some of its most engaging characters.

Study questions

1. Make a list of all the women in the *Odyssey*.
2. Categorise them under the following headings:
   - Immortal or mortal
   - Real/human form or fantasy
   - A help or a hindrance
   - In a family or isolated
3. For each woman in a family, assess her relationship with her husband in terms of power.
4. Who are the independent, single women? Assess the relationship each has with Odysseus.

ACTIVITY

Choose an Odyssey-inspired book, artwork or film, and give a five-minute presentation of it to your class. Combine all your presentations into an *Odyssey* Fest for the rest of your year.

CLASSICAL LEGACY

You can fly Odyssey Airlines from London, drive a Ulysse car, watch *2001: A Space Odyssey* – the name is synonymous with journeys. New versions of the story appear regularly on stage, television and radio, and countless films have been inspired by the epic. Episodes from it have provided subject matter for artists for over 2,500 years, and it continues to be reinvented because of the universality of its themes and the richness of Odysseus' character. The narrative of the Odyssey has had a fundamental influence on storytelling: it has been described as 'the most encyclopaedic compendium of plot devices in the whole of ancient storytelling, and one of the most dazzling displays of narrative fireworks anywhere in ancient literature' (N. J. Lowe, *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* (CUP, 2000)).

SLAVES

Eumaeus takes seriously his responsibility for his master's livestock, and resents the presence of the Suitors. He has a fundamental respect for his master, the laws of Zeus and justice.

Eurycleia shows a similar devotion to the family, and outrage at the Suitors. She is retained in the family as a nurse and now has the honour of being Telemachus' torchbearer.

These two slaves have arrived in the house through being captured in war and kidnapped by pirates. We know, too, from Eurymedusa's story and the casual way in which Odysseus mentions taking what he needed from the Cicones, that pirates, wars and kidnapping are ways of life.

There must have been many others working in the palaces – we know about the fifty maids who work at the loom in Odysseus' palace, and the same in Scherie, and the meat carvers taken to the banquets in Ithaca, but not much else. Only slaves who have a role in the success of the hero's *nostos* are part of the heroic world. The purpose of the epic is the *kleos* of the hero, not the life of the slave.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'The actions of the *Odyssey* are motivated by the idea of a return to the 'inner space' by Odysseus' travels to Ithaca, by the reassertion of identity and of ties with members of the household (Eumaius, Eurycleia and Philoetius), by Odysseus' reunion with Telemachus and Laertes. Reassertion of control in the palace in Ithaca and the reaffirmation of a natural sequence of generations is a crucial aspect of social order . . . Yet more prominent than all of these returns and reaffirmations is, of course, Odysseus' reunion with Penelope, a union of male and female, which combines elements of identity, sexuality, economic well-being and social functions.'

Ahuvia Kahane Homer, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury 2012), pp. 160–161

What evidence can you find to support the idea that Homer is concerned with exploring the nature of social order in the *Odyssey*?

TOPIC REVIEW

1. How important is *xenia* to the plot and themes of the *Odyssey*?
2. To what extent do the immortals dominate the plot and themes of the *Odyssey*?
3. To what extent is justice achieved at the end of the *Odyssey*?
4. How important are family relationships to the plot and themes of the *Odyssey*?
5. To what extent would you agree that women, mortal and immortal, are the most engaging feature of the *Odyssey*?

Further Reading

J. Griffin, *Homer: The Odyssey (Landmarks of World Literature)* (CUP, 2010)
Richard Jenkyns, *Classical Epic Homer and Virgil* (BCP, 1992)
Ahuvia Kahane, 'Mortality and the Divine', Chapter 9 in *Homer for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury, 2012)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Passage A: Odyssey Book 17, 486–503

That was the talk among the Suitors, but Antinous took no notice of what they said, and Telemachus, though the blow made him bitterly sorry for his father, let no tear from his eyes fall to the ground, but shook his head in silence, filled with thoughts of revenge. But when the wise Queen Penelope heard of the assault on the stranger in her palace she cried out with her maids around her: 'I hope the Archer Apollo strikes you as you struck him!' And the housekeeper Eurynome chimed in: 'Ah, if we could only have our wishes, there's not a man among them who'd see Dawn on her beautiful throne tomorrow.'

'Nurse dear,' the thoughtful Penelope went on, 'I hate the whole gang for the wicked plots they hatch, but Antinous especially is like a black spirit of destruction. An unfortunate stranger, driven by poverty, came wandering through the house begging. All the rest were generous and filled his bag; but Antinous threw a stool at his back and hit him on the right shoulder.'

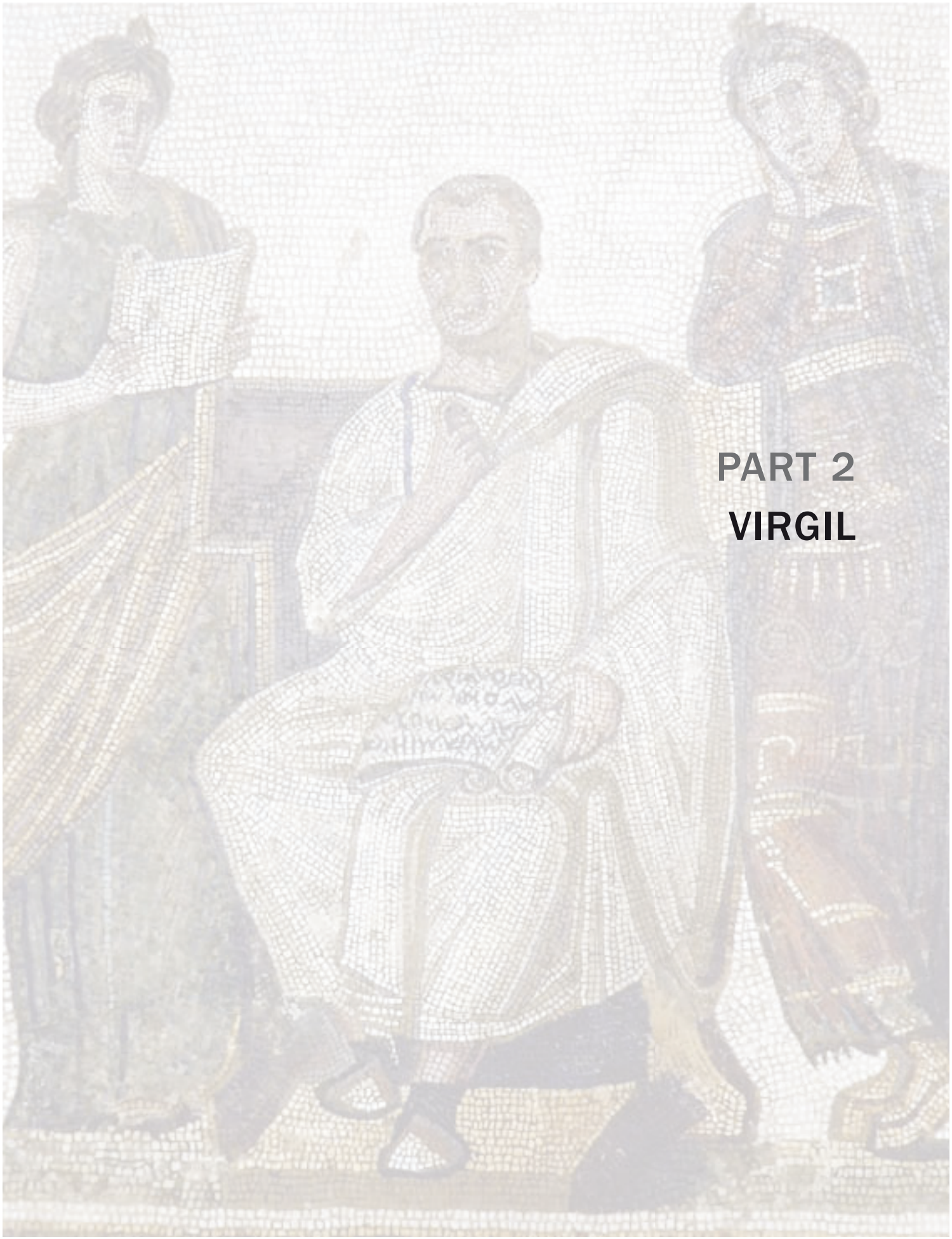
Trans: E. V. Rieu

AS Level

1. What had made Antinous so angry? [2]
2. Does Antinous deserve the description given of him by Penelope? Use this passage as a starting point for your discussion. [16]

A Level

1. To what extent does Homer present the Suitors as equally demanding of their fate? Use this passage as a starting point for your discussion. [20]
2. To what extent would removing the immortals from the *Odyssey* improve or weaken the poem? [30]



PART 2
VIRGIL

THE *AENEID*

3.1 Literary Techniques and Composition

TOPIC OVERVIEW

- composition of the epic
- structure and plot of the epic
- language of the epic including the use of speeches, themes, flashback, similes and other narrative and descriptive techniques and their effects
- Homeric influence

The following prescribed sources are covered in this topic:

- Virgil, *Aeneid*, Books 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Remember that you will be given credit in the exam if you study extra sources and make relevant use of them in your answers.

This topic discusses Virgil's literary background and relationship to Homer. It explores various features of his style and the way he uses language to convey his themes.

COMPOSITION

dactylic hexameter – a poetic metre in which a line contains six feet. Each foot is made up of either two long syllables or one long and two short syllables, giving the poet the flexibility to vary the speed and mood of the line.

Although we know that Homer's epics were recited by bards to the accompaniment of music, we are not sure how or when or by whom they were composed. It is quite different with Virgil's *Aeneid*.

When he started work on it in about 29 BC, Virgil was already well known from his previous works: the *Eclogues* and the *Georgics*. His patron was Maecenas, a close adviser of the Emperor Augustus. We have detailed knowledge of the political context in which the *Aeneid* was written (see pp. 193–206). Like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, it is an epic poem written in the **dactylic hexameter**, and, thanks to a biography by the fourth-century writer Aelius Donatus, we have information about how Virgil composed it:

PS

> 'As for the *Aeneid*, he first drafted it in prose and divided it into twelve books, deciding to construct it bit by bit, so that he could do each part as it seized his fancy, taking up nothing in order.'
>
> Aelius Donatus, *Life of Virgil*, 21, 23, trans. David Scott Wilson-Okamura

This biography is thought to be based on a lost work by Suetonius, and cannot necessarily be taken as accurate, but we do know that Virgil worked on the *Aeneid* for ten years. Each line was edited meticulously, and the finished result went through many revisions by the author. The composition of the epic was a topic of conversation even in the poet's lifetime. Propertius (50–15 BC) writes: 'Give way, you Roman authors! Give way, you Greeks! Something more than the *Iliad*'s being born' (Propertius *Elegies*, 2, 34ff, trans A. S. Kline).

EXPLORE FURTHER

For a fuller discussion of the composition of the *Aeneid*, see W. A. Camps, *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid*, Appendix 1 (OUP, 1969)

S & C

Virgil was familiar with the work of Catullus (84–54). Read his Poem 64 for an example of a poem which may have had an influence on the *Aeneid*.

Can you find any similarities?

THE PLOT

Book 1 The Trojans, seven years after leaving Troy, are just off the coast of Sicily. They are therefore very near to Italy. Juno, however, is determined that they should not reach their destination and sends a storm to blow them off course to the north African coast. They arrive in Carthage, Juno's favoured city. Venus complains to Jupiter about her son's

FIGURE 38
'Tell me, Muse . . .' This third-century mosaic from Sousse in Tunisia shows Virgil with **the Muses** Clio and Melpomene.

the Muses – nine Muses protected the arts and sciences. Calliope is the Muse of epic, Erato of love poetry, Melpomene of tragedy and Clio of history. They lived on Mount Helicon.

EXAM TIP

Learners may use any translation of the text, but where a translation is printed on the question paper, two versions will be used:

The Aeneid translated by David West (Penguin, 2003)

Virgil: The Aeneid, translated by A.S. Kline, online at http://www.poetryintranslation.com

suffering. He reassures her that Aeneas will reach Italy and that his descendants will found a great city, which will rule the world. Venus then sends Cupid to impersonate Ascanius and make Dido fall in love with Aeneas.

Book 2 Aeneas tells the story of the fall of Troy. Sinon had tricked the Trojans into taking in the wooden horse and the Greeks had entered the city and slaughtered King Priam. Hector had appeared to Aeneas in a dream, telling him to leave. Aeneas had escaped with his father Anchises, and his son Ascanius. His wife, Creusa, was lost in the confusion. Her ghost appeared to him and told him that his future was with a new wife in Italy.

Book 3 This book is about the seven years of wandering. Among other things, Aeneas goes past **Actium**. He gets a prophecy that he will know he has arrived at the destined place when they are so hungry that they eat their tables. His father Anchises dies while they are in Sicily.

Book 4 The story resumes. Dido gives in to her love for Aeneas and thinks they will build a city together, but he gets a message from Jupiter, reminding him of his mission. He puts his duty above his love and, despite pleas from Dido, he leaves. She is in despair and kills herself.

KEY EVENT

Battle of Actium – the naval battle in 31 BC in which Octavian defeated Mark Antony and Cleopatra, and became the supreme ruler in Rome

Book 5 The Trojans return to Sicily and celebrate funeral games in honour of Anchises. Inspired by Juno, the women set fire to the ships, but Aeneas prays for help and Jupiter puts the fire out. Aeneas agrees to allow some of his people to stay in Sicily. They set out for Italy, but the ship's helmsman, Palinurus, is lost overboard.

Book 6 Aeneas visits the Sibyl at Cumae in order to get a prophecy from Apollo and to visit his father in the Underworld. He talks to several ghosts, including those of Palinurus and Dido, before meeting his father, who shows him the Roman heroes who are waiting to be born. This inspires Aeneas to fulfil his mission.

Book 7 The Trojans arrive at the mouth of the Tiber and receive a sign to say that they have reached their destination. King Latinus welcomes them and is willing for his daughter to marry Aeneas. Juno intervenes and inspires Amata, Latinus' wife, to object vehemently to the marriage. Juno then causes Turnus to be consumed with anger. War breaks out.

Book 8 Aeneas leaves the Trojan camp to seek help from Evander, who lives in Pallanteum, a town on the site of Rome. When Aeneas arrives, Evander and his son Pallas are engaged in celebrating Hercules' destruction of the monster Cacus. Evander shows Aeneas the city and sends his son, Pallas, to fight alongside the Trojans. Venus brings Aeneas new armour, including a shield which depicts Octavian and the battle of Actium.

Book 9 Aeneas is away, and Turnus attacks the Trojan camp. Nisus and Euryalus set out at night to try to get a message to Aeneas, but are both killed. Turnus breaks into the Trojan camp, but eventually has to escape without doing much damage.

Book 10 Aeneas returns with Pallas. Pallas is killed by Turnus, who takes off his sword-belt and wears it. Aeneas rages over the battlefield, killing many in revenge, including Lausus and his father Mezentius.

Book 11 Both sides bury their dead. Pallas' body is taken back to Evander. Drances proposes that Turnus should face Aeneas alone, but the battle continues. Camilla joins the fighting, and is killed.

Book 12 A truce is agreed so that a single combat can take place between Aeneas and Turnus. With help from Juturna, Turnus' sister, the truce is broken, and fierce fighting follows. Latinus' city is attacked, Amata commits suicide, and Turnus prepares to meet Aeneas alone. Juno does a deal with Jupiter: she will stop interfering if the new race adopts Italian, not Trojan, customs. Jupiter agrees. Aeneas wounds Turnus, who begs for mercy. Aeneas, noticing that Turnus is wearing Pallas' sword-belt, kills him.

By the end of your first reading of the *Aeneid*, you should know something about:

- **Characters:** Aeneas, Amata, Anchises, Anna, Ascanius (Iulus), Camilla, Cassandra, Charon, Creusa, Dido, Drances, Euryalus, Evander, Hector, Hecuba, Helen, Iarbas, Iris, Juno, Jupiter, Juturna, Laocoon, Latinus, Lausus, Lavinia, Mercury, Mezentius, Neoptolemus (Pyrrhus), Nisus, Palinurus, Pallas, Priam, the Sibyl, Sinon, Sychaeus, Tarchon, Turnus, Venus.
- **Places:** Carthage, Cumae, Latinus' city, Pallanteum, Rome, Troy.
- **Miscellaneous:** an arrow; pizza bases (well, something like them . . .), a sow and piglets, a sword-belt, a lion-skin worn on the shoulders, three people whose heads catch fire, a dead pet, a dog with three heads, swimming dolphins, a golden bough, a leaky boat and a shield!

EXPLORE FURTHER

Both of the following books give support in understanding the epic:

William S. Anderson, *The Art of the Aeneid* (BCP, 1989)

R. D. Williams, *The Aeneid of Virgil: A Commentary Based on the Translation of C. Day Lewis* (BCP, 1985)

THE STRUCTURE OF THE *AENEID*

The point made most often about the structure of the *Aeneid* is that the first half is an *Odyssey*, the second an *Iliad*. This is true to the extent that Aeneas is wandering until Book 6 and thereafter arrives in Latium where the war begins. In Book 7, Virgil calls upon the Muse again, at the beginning of what he says is the most important part of his epic: 'For me this is the birth of a higher order of things. This is a greater work I now set in motion.'

But this *Odyssey–Iliad* pattern is only the most superficial part of the structure. In his article, 'The Architecture of the Aeneid', G. E. Duckworth discusses various patterns in the structure. The books in the first half mirror in subject matter those in the second half, thus:

ACTIVITY

Work out the best way for you to recall facts, and set about remembering as much as possible. It may be best for you to listen to a recording, write out a summary, do a mind-map or make a story board, for example.

Books 1 and 7	The arrival in a strange land and a friendly reception
Books 2 and 8	Set in a city (2 Troy, 8 Pallanteum)
Books 3 and 9	Concerned with father and son (3 Anchises, 9 Ascanius)
Books 4 and 10	Begins with conflict with an individual, and ends in death
Books 5 and 11	Funeral games (5 Anchises, 11 Pallas)
Books 6 and 12	Aeneas receives his mission (6) and achieves it (12)

Another model shows:

Book 1	Juno and a storm	Book 7	Juno and war
Book 2	Destruction of Troy	Book 8	Birth of Rome
Book 3	Interlude of wandering	Book 9	Interlude at Trojan camp
Book 4	Tragedy of Dido	Book 10	Tragedy of war
Book 5	Games: reduced tension	Book 11	Truce: reduced tension
Book 6	Future revealed	Book 12	Future assured

Another way to look at the structure is through parallel characters, who contrast or echo each other. Dido/Turnus and Pallas/Lausus are good examples.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Gransden in *Virgil, The Aeneid* (CUP, 2004), likens Book 4, for example, to a tragedy: 'with scenes between the protagonists (Aeneas, Dido and her sister-confidante Anna), divine messengers and interventions, with the author as chorus, not only narrating but commenting on the action'.

Fear and pity are two emotions which Aristotle says are at the heart of tragedy. How does Virgil stir these emotions in the reader of Book 4?

NARRATOR INTERVENTION

Study question
What parallel or contrasting characters can you find in the *Aeneid*? Explain your reasons for making the links.

To the Muses

Like Homer, Virgil begins his epic with a prayer in the proem to the Muse: 'Tell me, Muse, the causes of her anger . . .' (Book 1, 8). Later he calls upon Erato: 'Come goddess, instruct your prophet' (Book 7, 41), and Calliope: 'Unroll with me now the mighty scroll of war' (Book 9, 525). He begins the catalogue with a call to all the Muses: 'Now goddesses, it is time to open up Mount Helicon, to set your songs in motion . . . You are

the divine Muses. You remember, goddesses, and can utter what you remember. Our ears can barely catch the faintest whisper of the story' (Book 7, 641).

To the Gods

A direct address to a god lifts the narrative from the human to the divine plane. To stress the horror of war, Virgil exclaims, 'What god could unfold all this bitter suffering for me?', and 'Was it your will, O Jupiter, that peoples who were to live at peace for all time, should clash so violently in war?' (Book 12, 500–505). He addresses Mars when Aeneas sets up the armour of Mezentius as a trophy to him (Book 11, 7).

To himself or his reader

Virgil draws attention to his role as poet in his comment on Nisus and Euryalus: 'Fortune has favoured you both! If there is any power in my poetry, the day will never come when time will erase you from the memory of man . . .' (Book 9, 446ff).

On several occasions, he shares with his reader information that points out irony or builds up tension. 'He will bitterly regret this spoil and the day he took it,' he tells us of Turnus taking Pallas' sword-belt (Book 10, 500). When Turnus is failing, and Virgil wants his readers to feel the despair of the young warrior, he uses the first person: 'Just as when we are asleep, when in the weariness of night rest lies heavy on our eyes, we dream' (Book 12, 908).

Sometimes the intervention is by way of a general aside: 'priests as we know, are ignorant' (Book 4, 65), or 'who can deceive a lover?' (Book 4, 296), he asks in relation to Dido.

ACTIVITY

Look up the examples of Virgil's interventions, and evaluate what they add to the narrative.

Participants

Catalogues are made more dynamic by direct address to some of the participants: for example, Oebalus (Book 7, 734) and Ufens (Book 7, 745). The individual tragedies of warfare are highlighted by direct address to the warriors, as to Cydon (Book 10, 325), and Larides and Thymber (Book 10, 391).

FLASHBACK

Books 2 and 3 are a flashback. At Dido's request, Aeneas tells the story of the fall of Troy and his adventures before arriving in Carthage. This echoes Odysseus' tale to the Phaeacians in Books 9–12 of the *Odyssey*.

The first-person account:

- increases the tragedy. The story is overlaid with the narrator's knowledge of the final outcome of events: 'if divine fate, if the minds of the gods had not been set against us, Laocoon would surely have forced us to tear open the hiding places of the Greeks with our swords, Troy would still be standing and the high citadel of Priam would still be in its place.'

- gives us a precise perspective. We share Aeneas' impressionistic picture of darkness pierced by glinting helmets and engulfing flames as he sees the Greeks from his house, and his bird's eye view of Pyrrhus breaking down the palace door and forcing his way towards the altar, for example.
- is Aeneas' story to Dido. Does he have any motive for putting a particular 'spin' on his story?

The flashback gives Dido the time to hear about Aeneas' adventures, admire his courage and submit to the effects of Cupid's poison.

SPEECHES

There are fewer speeches than in Homer. Virgil himself tells much more of his story and reveals his characters through third person narration. Books 2 and 3 is a flashback where Aeneas tells Dido his story in one long speech.

Study question
Look at Aeneas' account of:

- the girls and boys bringing the horse into the city
- the death of Laocoon and his sons
- the deaths of Polites and Priam
- his return home to his family.

How does Aeneas make these accounts full of pathos?

Prophecies are pronounced through speeches

Book 1, 223–296: Jupiter tells Venus about Rome.
Book 2, 289–295: Hector talks to Aeneas in a dream.
Book 4, 621–629: Dido's curse, though not a prophecy, refers to the future.
Book 6, 83–97: The Sibyl tells Aeneas about Italy.
Book 6, 756–886: Anchises shows Aeneas the future Romans.
Book 8, 36–65: Tiber talks to Aeneas in a dream.
Book 10, 105–115: Jupiter announces that men will be responsible for their actions.
Book 11, 535–594: Diana tells of Camilla's past, and announces her fate.
Book 12, 791–840: Jupiter tells Juno about the new race, and she replies.

Immortals deliver speeches to mortals

Book 1, 335–370: Venus tells Aeneas about Dido.
Book 2, 577–587: Venus stops Aeneas killing Helen.
Book 4, 265–278: Mercury delivers Jupiter's message to Aeneas.
Book 7, 96–101: The oracle talks to Latinus.
Book 7, 421–434: Allecto speaks to Turnus.
Book 9, 653–656: Apollo talks to Ascanius.
Book 10, 228–245: Cymodocea warns Aeneas.

Discussion and conversation

Book 4, 105–127: Juno and Venus plot the marriage.
Book 6, 388–407: Sibyl and Charon enjoy challenging each other.
Book 7, 116–127: Ascanius announces they are eating their tables.
Book 12, 19–53: Latinus tries to change Turnus' mind.

Rhetorical or formal speeches and messages

Book 1, 552–559: Ilioneus addresses Dido.
Book 2, 42–49: Laocoon entreats the Trojans to be suspicious of the wooden horse.
Book 4, 333–361: Aeneas responds to Dido.
Book 7, 195–211: Latinus to Ilioneus.
Book 7, 213–248: Ilioneus addresses Latinus.
Book 8, 127–151: Aeneas to Evander.
Book 11, 252–293: Diomede gives his reply.
Book 11, 302–335: Latinus speaks to his people.
Book 11, 343–375: Drances puts the case against Turnus.
Book 11, 378–444: Turnus replies to Drances.

EXAM TIP

The list of speeches is in the context of literary style. Use it too as a resource when you are looking for examples for essays on characters or themes.

Prayers

Book 4, 206–218: Iarbas to Jupiter.
Book 6, 56–76: Aeneas to Apollo.
Book 10, 668–679: Turnus to Jupiter.
Book 12, 176–194: Aeneas to Jupiter.

Tragedy

Book 4, 31–53: Anna advises her sister.
Book 4, 305–330: Dido pleads with Aeneas.

Rousing battle speech

Book 10, 369–378: Pallas to his troops.
Book 11, 732–740: Tarchon to the Etruscans.

Victor's speech to victim

Book 10, 491–495: Turnus killing Pallas.
Book 10, 811–830: Aeneas killing Lausus.

Dying words

Book 4, 651–660: Dido reviews her achievements.
Book 10, 900–906: Mezentius' dying words.
Book 11, 823–827: Camilla's dying words.
Book 12, 931–938: Turnus' plea to Aeneas.

Study question
Read Aeneas' and Evander's speeches on the death of Pallas (Book 11, 42–58 and 152–181). What do we learn about the speakers from studying their words?

Lamentation

Book 9, 481–497: the mother of Euryalus for her son.
Book 10, 846–866: Mezentius on the death of Lausus.

ACTIVITY

Study the speeches listed, then choose one to act out in front of the class.

Discuss your interpretation of the speech. Analyse why the passage is more effective in direct speech than it would be in a third person narrative.

Select other speeches to add to the ones listed.

Book 11, 42–58: Aeneas for Pallas.
Book 11, 152–181: Evander for Pallas.
Book 12, 872–884: Juturna on the imminent death of Turnus.

Ekphrasis

Book 8, 185–275: Evander about Cacus.
Book 11, 535–594: Diana about Camilla.

ekphrasis – a passage inserted into the story which describes a work of art or tells another story in a digression

THEMES

The first few lines of the *Aeneid* give us the outline of the story and prompt us to ask questions about the themes.

I sing of arms	War with all the human suffering, political alliances, moral justification, loyalty – this is a huge topic in itself.
and of the man	If this is an epic about an individual, then all human emotions are there to be explored. How will the man behave? Is he a hero? What is a hero?
fated	If he is fated, what about free will? How free will this man be to act as he wants? Does he know what his fate is? How do the gods communicate? What is the importance of prophecy?
to be an exile	Where will he go? How will he be treated? In the twenty-first century, we seem to be more aware than ever of what it means to be a refugee and stateless.
who left Troy	Leaving a city raises questions about relating to the past, acceptance of loss, the values of the city left behind, and the possibility of recreating those values.
and came to Italy	Why Italy? What clashes will there be between the cultures? What power struggles?
anger of Juno	Why should Juno be angry? Who are the gods, and what is their role? What role will strong emotions like anger play in the story?
sufferings in war	Death is inevitable in war. The man will undoubtedly lose those he loves. How important are friends and family? Is killing ever justified? Will his suffering destroy him? Will there be peace?
carry his gods	Being entrusted with carrying the sacred images of the gods from their temple in Troy and finding them a new home is a great responsibility. Will he succeed?

the Latin race	Out of the wars will come a new beginning. How will the new race be formed? Who will hold the power? What is the plan for its development? How important is the vision of the future? How important are families in this process?
high walls of Rome	What is the role in this poem of a city which doesn't even exist?
a man of such piety	Given the situation he is in with war, suffering, divine anger and life as an exile, how is the man going to maintain his piety? Why does a pious man suffer from divine anger?

These themes are discussed throughout the book.

ACTIVITY

CW

Professor Stephen Harrison selected five key themes for his Oxford University video-clips on the *Aeneid*. They were: cities, heroism, dying young, gods and violence.

In groups, draw up a list of the five themes in the *Aeneid* that you think are the most important. There will be no one correct list, and you will probably find lots of overlap between themes. Your discussions should make you realise that the *Aeneid* is much more than a simple story, and that it touches on many of the big questions about life.

Justify your choices to the rest of the class.

Cities

Exile and the founding of cities is a recurring theme.

'… we were driven by signs from heaven into distant exile to look for a home in some deserted land.' (Book 3, 3).

Rome itself is referred to explicitly.

Book 1, 206: Aeneas tells his men 'the kingdom of Troy shall rise again'.
Book 1, 257–296: Jupiter tells Venus about the 'walls of Mars' which Romulus will build.
Book 2, 281–295: Hector instructs Aeneas to 'look for a great city to establish'.
Book 2, 776–789: Creusa tells him to go 'where the Lydian Thybris flows'.
Book 4, 340–346: Aeneas explains to Dido that he must go to Italy to found a race, even though he would rather return home and rebuild Troy.
Book 6, 84–87: The Sibyl talks of the Tiber foaming with blood, in a reference to the war with the Latins.
Book 6, 870–874: Anchises refers to the Mausoleum of Augustus in which Marcellus is to be buried.

ACTIVITY

Test your knowledge of the plot by explaining these signs:

- a flame and a shooting star
- the Tiber reversing its flow
- a sow and piglets
- eating tables.

S & C

Amanda Claridge in *The Oxford Archaeological Guide to Rome* (OUP, 1998) discusses the archaeological remains relating to Augustan Rome (pp. 158–161, 177–192).

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read Book 3, which is about Aeneas' travels and is important for the theme of cities.

Aeneas' visit to Pallanteum in Book 8 embodies the theme of new cities. Pallanteum is on the site of the future Rome, thus providing familiar topographical and cultural references to the city: the Capitol, Aventine, Carmental Gate, Asylum and Lupercal and House of Tarpeia. Virgil even makes a comparison with Augustan Rome: there were cattle everywhere, lowing in the forum and the 'now luxurious district of the Carinae'. The shield too shows Rome, in particular the temple of Apollo.

There are possible allusions to Rome throughout the narrative. The head of a horse found when Carthage was being built (Book 1, 444) perhaps alludes to the foundation myth that a head was found buried on the Capitol in Rome.

The ghostly heroes exercising in the Elysian fields in Book 6, 642–644, and the men in Latinus city, 'training chariot teams in clouds of dust' (Book 7, 163–166), recall the Campus Martius of Augustan Rome.

In Book 6, 69–70, Aeneas pronounces that he will 'build a temple to Phoebus and Diana' (Octavian himself had built a temple to Apollo on the Palatine, and moved the Sibylline books there).

See also the discussion of the Trojans, Carthaginians and Italians on pp. 171–174.

War and peace

Virgil had seen Italy torn apart by civil war, and this theme is reflected by images of the peaceful world of trees and rivers being destroyed by storms and raging torrents. When

FIGURE 39
This relief sculpture shows Apollo, followed by Diana and Latona, moving towards a winged Victory who is pouring wine. In the background is thought to be the temple to Apollo which Augustus built next to his house on the Palatine Hill in Rome.

ACTIVITY

Find examples of:

- animals used to explore the theme of people being overcome by their *furor* or rage in war (you will find plenty of examples in Books 10 and 12)
- storms as expressions of an all-powerful enemy
- trees as symbols of hope and stability
- fire to express all-consuming emotion.

Keep references to them in your notes, and use them in essays where relevant.

An essay question on Aeneas, for example, could draw upon several of these images.

FIGURE 40
Two thousand years after Virgil, the Tiber is still the scene for religious ritual. This photograph shows an annual procession in honour of the Madonna.

the Latins are rushing to fight, 'the trees shivered at the noise, and the whole forest rang to its very depths'. A simile in Book 2 about the felling of an ash tree is used to evoke the destruction of Troy.

A river flowing past shady woodlands portrays the idyllic picture of a peaceful beginning in a new land. Creusa tells Aeneas: 'The river Thybris flows with smooth advance through a rich land of brave warriors.' However, rivers in spate represent the fury of war against which man is powerless. Pyrrhus rushing into the palace is like a river which has burst its banks.

Virgil uses winds and storms as well as rivers to express the destruction of peace. The image in Book 1 of the winds brawling, howling, chained and bridled, and full of angry passions, conveys well their destructive force.

Passions are conveyed too through images from Greek tragedy. Dido rushes through the streets like a Bacchant when she has been hit by Cupid's arrow, and when Aeneas is leaving, she rages like Pentheus, or Orestes pursued by Furies. Both Helen and Amata are described as pretending to be Bacchants, and Rumour runs raving like a Bacchant with the news of Dido's death.

Deaths of the young and vulnerable

War, particularly civil war, brings suffering to families. Dying sons and grieving parents feature throughout the epic.

Tracing the imagery and finding links is one of the rewards of reading Virgil closely, and the above is only a taster of what images can be found, and the subtlety with which

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Stephen Harrison, in his Oxford video-clip on the *Aeneid*, suggests a link between this theme of early death, and the death of Augustus' nephew, Marcellus.

Study the sorrow shown for the death of Marcellus in Book 6, 860–886. CW

ACTIVITY

Study the deaths of the sons of Laocoon (Book 2, 201–224), Polites, Book 2, 526–543), Euryalus (Book 9, 431–445) and Lausus (Book 10, 789–832). How is their youth emphasised?

Look for evidence of Turnus as young and vulnerable.

Look for similes which emphasise the victim's vulnerability.

Who is Astyanax? Virgil's readers would know his story well. Why does Virgil mention him? (Book 2, 456–457).

Why are the young among the first souls Aeneas comes across in the Underworld?

Study the description of the suffering of Sylvia's pet stag (Book 7, 500–502). Compare it to the scene in Priam's palace.

ACTIVITY

Look for images of night or darkness in the *Aeneid*.

How does Virgil use them to create a suitable setting for his themes?

Virgil touches on his themes. Remember that the conclusions drawn above are the result of interpretation. Virgil works by allusion rather than overt statements.

SIMILES

Similes in Virgil are usually long, sometimes referred to as extended similes. The best way to understand the multi-layered interpretation of Virgil's similes is to examine one of them in detail.

PS

> 'At that moment I seemed to see the whole of Ilium settling into flames like an ancient ash tree high in the mountains which farmers have hacked with blow upon blow of their double axes, labouring to fell it; again and again it threatens to fall, its foliage shudders and its head trembles and nods until at last it succumbs to its wounds and breaks with a dying groan, spreading ruin along the ridge.'
>
> Book 2, lines 626–631

The simple comparison is that of the collapse of Troy with the collapse of a tree.

An analysis of the different components shows the complexity of the simile.

Ancient	Troy is an ancient city, and it is a whole civilisation, developed over many years which is being destroyed.
Ash	There is a possible link between the ash tree, nymphs called Meliae and the creation of the bronze-age men. If Virgil intended this, it would be a comment on the destruction of Troy marking the end of a particular era. The ash was a common sight in southern Italy, and so would be easily imagined by Virgil's audience.
High in the mountains	Troy was built on a hill.

Farmers	Virgil often uses rural subject matter in his similes.
Hacked blow upon blow	Conveys the farmers' determination to fell the tree. They will not be satisfied until it has fallen.
Double axes	These are the weapons of the Homeric world as well.
It threatens to fall	'Threatens' focuses not on the farmers, but the tree/city itself which now becomes the subject as it threatens to fall. It seems to be resisting, but we await its inevitable collapse.
Its foliage shudders	The leaves are shaken. The same Latin word for shudders is used elsewhere in Book 2, always for extreme fear in humans such as when the monsters attack Laocoon. The tree, and so Troy, is being personified. (The personification comes over even more strongly if you know that the Latin word that Virgil used for foliage also means hair).
Its head trembles and nods	The personification continues, as the tree now has a head. As the tree becomes human, we get the violent image of a person being hacked to death. This brings us closer to the horror of what is happening not just to Troy the city, but to individual Trojans. The image of a tree reacting to a violent onslaught is used again in Book 4, when Aeneas the oak is battered by the pleas for him to stay in Carthage.
wounds	The personification continues, intensifying the picture of individuals being killed. The word 'wound' is used frequently of the victims of war, and also of Dido in Books 4 and 6.
dying groans	The sound of the wood cracking and the tree falling is now secondary in our minds to the groans of humans dying as they are hacked down by the Greeks.
spreading ruin along the ridge	Virgil pans out now from the individual tree to the sight of its impact on the other trees on the ridge; at the same time, we move from the individual dying Trojan to the effect of one collapsing building on the city as a whole.

ACTIVITY

The ash tree simile has been analysed for you. Now take another simile and analyse it in the same way.

Sort the similes into subject matter.

What is the effect of the similes in the *Aeneid* as a whole?

Online you will find a table of similes, allowing them to be located, discussed and selected for use in essays.

EKPHRASIS

Ekphrasis means 'speaking out'. In an ekphrasis, the poem is interrupted by a description of a work of art or by a story.

FIGURE 41
A marble picture from Pompeii which shows a Bacchant running wild. Both Dido and Amata are compared with Bacchants.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'In Vergil's poetry everything participates in the inner drama and reflects the poet's awareness of the stirrings within the souls of his characters and of the destiny inherent in events. Everything – landscape, morning, evening, night, dress and arms, every gesture, movement, and image becomes a symbol of the soul.'

Viktor Pöschl, *The Art of Vergil: Image and Symbol in the Aeneid* (University of Michigan Press, 1971)

How well does Pöschl's statement apply to the characterisation of Aeneas?

There are five notable examples of descriptions of works of art in the *Aeneid*. They provide accounts which are interesting in themselves, but they also link into the narrative. Sometimes they have resonances in the real world of Augustan Rome, or help us to explore the themes of the *Aeneid*.

The sculpture on the Carthaginians' temple to Juno (Book 1, 450–493)

The scene tells stories from the Trojan War. Aeneas comes upon it in a wooded grove in the middle of Carthage.

Aeneas says it allays his fears (but note the irony: built as it is in Juno's city, it is bound to be celebrating, not lamenting, the fall of Troy).

Study questions

1. Is it significant that the sculpture is on a temple to Juno?
2. What stories does Virgil include?
3. Why does he choose them?
4. What does the temple tell you about Dido?
5. How does it link to the themes of the *Aeneid*?

The sculpture on the temple to Apollo at Cumae (Book 6, 9–36)

The sculpture shows the story of Daedalus and Icarus. The sculptor, Daedalus himself, cannot finish the sculpture.

Study questions

1. Why can't Daedalus finish the sculpture?
2. How many other instances are there in the *Aeneid* of the death of a son?

Aeneas' shield (Book 8, 624–731)

The shield has a very clear literary origin. In the *Iliad*, Thetis gives her son Achilles a shield made by Hephaestus. This shield carries a very clear political message to the reader, but means nothing to Aeneas, who is 'rejoicing at the things pictured on it without knowing what they were'. See p. 205.

The sword-belt of Pallas (Book 10, 495–500)

A conquered enemy's weapons should be dedicated to a god, not worn by the killer. Turnus, however, removes the sword-belt from Pallas and wears it himself. Virgil tells the reader that later on he would wish that he had acted differently. The story on the belt is the murder of forty-nine out of fifty sons of Aegyptus by their cousins, the daughters of Danaus, on their wedding night. The significance is much discussed by scholars. It could relate to marriage not consummated, lust for revenge, or the civil wars. There were statues telling the same story on the portico surrounding the temple of Apollo which Augustus himself dedicated in 28 BC.

Turnus's shield (Book 7, 789–802)

Turnus's shield shows Io, the daughter of Inachus, who was changed into a heifer by Jupiter to prevent Juno from seeing that he had taken Io as a mistress. Juno discovered the truth, sent Argus to guard Io and a gadfly to plague her. Again, there are various interpretations. Inachus is an ancestor of Turnus, so there is a family link.

CATALOGUE

A catalogue, or long list, is a traditional feature of epic. Homer had given a catalogue of ships in the *Iliad*. Virgil writes two catalogues: Book 7, 647–817 lists Latinus' allies and Book 10, 163–214 lists those of Aeneas. Virgil's catalogues are more than a list: they provide a picture of individuals, some in detail, and present the different groups which will be the ancestors of the Romans. The very naming of some of the places, such as Tibur or Praeneste, flourishing in Virgil's time, perhaps were intended to inspire patriotism and unity under the peace of Augustus. The last person to be mentioned in Book 7 is Camilla. She provides a contrast to the warriors who have gone before, and the description of her serves as an introduction to her appearance in Book 11.

DESCRIPTIVE TECHNIQUES

Many of Virgil's descriptions can be compared with the techniques of the cinema. He uses aerial views and panoramas, he zooms in and does close-focus shots. Sometimes the camera tracks its subject. He cuts between scenes and uses flashback. Often he includes sound effects, and mood-lighting for creating atmosphere.

FANTASY

Virgil creates characters worthy of any fantasy or horror writer.

S & C A stimulating examination of the topic, beyond that required at A Level, can be found in Michael Putman, *Virgil's Epic Designs: Ekphrasis in the Aeneid* (Yale University Press, 1998)

ACTIVITY

Work through Book 2, interpreting it as a film director might. Justify all your directions by close reference to the text.

ACTIVITY

Produce a classroom Underworld frieze. Find or draw images of underworld residents from Book 6, lines 268–680.

ACTIVITY

Compare Aeneas with either Achilles or Odysseus. In what ways is Aeneas different?

EXPLORE FURTHER

Joseph Farrell, The Virgilian Intertext, in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed Charles Martindale (CUP, 1997), discusses the relationship between the texts of Homer and Virgil.

HOMERIC INFLUENCE

With the *Aeneid*, Virgil rewrites and emulates Homeric epic for his Roman audience. It looks both to a Trojan past and to a Roman future. It has a comparable hero and subject matter; it uses the literary devices of Homer's epics, and is written in dactylic hexameters.

All three epics have a hero. When we study Aeneas, we shall see how changed he is from the Homeric model, and what that tells us about the sort of hero relevant to Rome under Augustus. (See pp. 159–161 for a full discussion of the heroes.)

Virgil uses epithets, repeated phrases, parallel scenes and characters, and similes, all familiar from Homer, but not in exactly the same way. The epithets used in the *Aeneid* are limited, and employed for the full force of their meaning, not for general colour or metrical purposes. Aeneas is good/devoted, and Dido is unfortunate or unhappy.

Whereas Homer had only the oral tradition of other epics and folk-myths to draw on, Virgil had the benefit of over 500 years of literature, and the influence of many writers is evident: among others, the Greek Callimachus for technical composition of the verse and intellectual sophistication; Catullus for his technical skill in expressing emotions; the Greek Plato and Roman Lucretius for their philosophy; and Cicero for the rhetoric of the law courts.

About half of Homer's epics are in the form of speeches, an opportunity for the bard not only to get into character as he delivers the speech, but to act out the story. The bard had to entertain his audience, and the recitation of the epic was a performance to be sung to musical accompaniment.

Virgil's poem would be recited, because poetry is essentially about the sounds of words, and a Roman would not, therefore, contemplate the silent reading of a poem. However, the reading could be done by anyone with a copy of the text, at any time, and there was no need for the devices that are in Homer as an aid to memory. Homer's dramatisation gave way to a more contemplative element in the *Aeneid*. There is more psychological depth to the characters, and there are pauses in the action where Virgil shares what is going on in the minds of his creations.

The major difference is perhaps in the purpose. Homer was telling stories of a timeless heroic world conjured up from legend. Virgil moves from fantasy to the real world, with appearances in Book 6, for example, of real Roman statesmen, and in Book 8 of the city of Rome with the Tiber.

FIGURE 42
This wall-painting from the Villa of Poppaea at Oplontis reflects, perhaps, the interest in poetry of the wealthy owners of this house.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

J. V. Muir in *Virgil, Selections from Aeneid* IV, *Handbook* (CUP, 1977) sums up the challenge faced by Virgil: 'How to connect an ancient, unfamiliar and heroic past with a sophisticated urban culture, how to reconstruct the generous formulaic structure of oral poetry so as to give the new style the benefit of both freedom and tradition, how to make formal use of two very different Homeric epics . . .'

How well does Book 8 illustrate Muir's statement?

ACTIVITY

As you read the *Aeneid*, make a note of parallel episodes, characters or descriptive techniques that have their origin in the *Odyssey* or *Iliad*. Examine what Virgil has changed and why. That will help you understand what makes this an epic for the Augustan age.

- Aeneas, for example, is a hero in the Trojan War, like Achilles. But he does not want to go to war, nor does he relish the opportunity to embark on a mission that will bring him eternal fame.
- Aeneas stays with Dido, as Odysseus stays with Circe and Calypso. Compare the emotional depth of the Homer and Virgil stories. Virgil is much more interested in the damaging effects of the hero's decision to leave.

EXPLORE FURTHER

The relationship between Homer and Virgil is discussed more fully in Richard Jenkyns, *Classical Epic, Homer and Virgil* (BCP, 1992).

TOPIC REVIEW

1. What do Virgil's similes add to the characterisation and themes?
2. How effectively does Virgil create fantastical scenes?
3. How does Virgil use images from nature to express his themes?
4. What techniques does Virgil use to create pathos?

Further Reading

CW

Listen to the BBC '*In Our Time*' podcast 'The *Aeneid*' with Edith Hall, Catherine Edwards and Philip Hardie.

Katherine Callen King, *Ancient Epic* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012)
W. A. Camps, *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid* (OUP, 1969)
J. Griffin, *Virgil (Ancients in Action)* (Bloomsbury, 2013)
R. D. Williams, *The Aeneid of Virgil: A Commentary Based on the Translation of C. Day Lewis* (Bloomsbury, 2013)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Passage A: *Aeneid* Book 2, 201–227

Laocoon, the chosen priest of Neptune, was sacrificing a huge bull at the holy altar, when suddenly there came over the calm water from Tenedos (I shudder at the memory of it), two serpents leaning into the sea in great coils and making side by side for the shore. Breasting the waves, they held high their blood-stained crests, and the rest of their bodies ploughed the waves behind them, their backs winding, coil upon measureless coil, through the sounding foam of the sea. Now they were on land. Their eyes were blazing and flecked with blood. They hissed as they licked their lips with quivering tongues. We grew pale at the sight and ran in all directions, but they made straight for Laocoon. First the two serpents seized his two young sons, twining round them both and feeding on their helpless limbs. Then when Laocoon came to the rescue with his sword in his hand, they seized him and bound him in huge spirals, and soon their scaly backs were entwined twice round his body and twice round his throat, their heads and necks high above him as he struggled to prize open their coils, his priestly ribbons befouled by gore and black venom, and all the time he was raising horrible cries to heaven like the bellowing of a wounded bull shaking the ineffectual axe out of its neck as it flies from the altar.

Trans: David West

1. How effectively does Virgil portray the attack of the sea monsters? [10]
2. Using this passage as a starting point, evaluate the use of the flashback technique in Book 2 in expressing the drama of the fall of Troy. [20]

3.2 The Heroic World: Characterisation and Themes

TOPIC OVERVIEW

- concepts, values and behaviour of a Greek and Roman hero
- characterisation of major and minor characters
- role of Aeneas in Rome's Imperial destiny
- portrayal of war
- the portrayal of different peoples; Trojans, Greeks, Carthaginians, Italians

The following prescribed sources are covered in this topic:

- Virgil, *Aeneid*, Books 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Remember that you will be given credit in the exam if you study extra sources and make relevant use of them in your answers.

This topic looks at Aeneas, how he differs from the Homeric hero, and what makes him a hero suited to the Augustan age. It looks at the peoples, with particular reference to the way they have a role in the creation of the Rome of the future, and the wars that take place before Aeneas can settle. It discusses also the major and minor characters in the story, and relates them to Virgil's possible intentions in writing the *Aeneid*.

CONCEPTS, VALUES AND BEHAVIOUR OF A GREEK AND ROMAN HERO

Virgil was writing an epic based on Homer. In Homer the hero:

- is intent on performing actions that will gain him a place in the repertoire of the bards, and so earn him fame and immortality (*kleos*)
- must be mortal, but high born
- is helped (or hindered) by the gods
- fights because it is an obligation to his family, ancestors and community
- fights for his own glory

- pursues gifts as a mark of honour (*timē*)
- looks impressive
- is ferocious when he fights
- shows emotion
- is skilled with words
- is often shown putting on his armour before going into battle.

Turnus displays many characteristics of the Homeric hero. He is presented as the second Achilles that the Sibyl predicted (Book 6, 89). He:

- has obligations as a leader
- burns with fury against his enemy
- is bold and brave in his fighting
- has divine protection
- is impressive in his armour
- has horses with 'super-equine' powers
- is proud and has a fear of shame
- is likened in similes to fierce animals
- is young.

Study question
Go through all the points listed about Turnus' heroic qualities. What specific references can you find in the text to support them?

He is also a Hector figure. He:

- defends his homeland against invaders
- fights for Lavinia and Amata, as Hector fights to protect his wife and mother
- takes on the role of protector for a king who is too old to fight.

Nisus and Euryalus relate to Achilles and Patroclus, the young heroes in Homer's *Iliad* in their close bond of friendship and thirst for glory.

Nisus' motivation for setting out on the night expedition is not so much to get a message to Aeneas, as to prove himself: 'My mind is not content to rest in peace and quiet, but has long been driving me to rush into battle or into some great enterprise.' His friend is 'overcome, pierced to the heart with a great love of glory', and declares, 'I have here a heart that despises the light, that would gladly spend life to buy the honour you are striving for.'

Ascanius responds in equally heroic terms: he not only offers rewards of silver cups, tripods and a gold mixing bowl, but promises also, in his father's name, 'twelve chosen matrons and twelve prisoners of war', satisfying the Homeric hero's need for *timē*.

When the two set out through the enemy camp, thoughts of Aeneas fade. Nisus is like a lion with 'jaws dripping with blood'. Euryalus is 'in a blazing fury' and 'hot for blood'. Virgil describes the soldiers they slaughter: one is propped up on a pile of rugs, his chest heaving, another is in a drunken stupor, another hides in panic. What glory does Virgil want us to see in this escapade?

When Euryalus is captured, Nisus throws himself at his captor in a vain attempt to save his friend. This is a brave gesture, and a heroic one, which will gain him the glory and fame craved for by the Homeric hero. But it is a selfish act as well. Nisus has chosen glory over the mission of summoning help from Aeneas.

Aeneas

The Homeric hero

He is mortal, but high born; helped (and hindered) by the gods; physically impressive; ferocious when he fights; a leader.

Like Achilles, Aeneas is the hero fighting in a foreign land; like Hector, he has the gods of Troy to protect; like Paris, he is mocked for effeminate dress; like Odysseus, he is a traveller who has arrived 'home' to conflict with a suitor. In Book 10, he is capable of behaving with the same bloodlust as Nisus and Euryalus, and like Achilles he selects prisoners to be sacrificed on his friend's funeral pyre.

The post-Homeric hero

Aeneas has already achieved fame by the time the epic begins: he recognises himself on the temple sculpture in Carthage, and Dido has heard of him: 'Who could fail to know about Aeneas and his ancestry?' she asks. He no longer needs or wants to pursue *kleos*, and is a reluctant story-teller.

Whereas Odysseus introduces himself with 'the whole world talks of my stratagems', Aeneas tells the 'Spartan huntress' that he is Aeneas 'known for my devotion'. He defines himself in terms of his obligations to the gods, his family and his people.

This 'devotion' or *pietas* is the essential difference between the Homeric and Roman hero. He is not fighting for his own glory, but for his people. Homeric heroes draw attention to themselves, but Aeneas is self-effacing. Far from showing emotion, he seems to suppress his feelings to the point of appearing hard, and unlike Odysseus remains silent even when there is a need for words.

Aeneas (most of the time):

- thinks of what he owes to his heirs, not himself, when he acts
- prays to the gods to get their approval before acting, and makes offerings to them after victory
- acts in accordance with fate, not his own inclinations
- acts for the good of the community
- is reluctant to fight
- shows courage, but not excessive anger.

Aeneas, when faced with a choice between affection and duty, abandoned Dido. It would be neat to conclude that Aeneas, the perfect Roman hero, always prioritises the common good and acts with humanity. However, when in the grip of *furor*, he is wild and vicious.

EXPLORE FURTHER

See Andrew Laird, Approaching characterisation in Virgil, in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed Charles Martindale (CUP, 1997).

CHARACTERISATION OF AENEAS

His status as hero, his *pietas* and *furor*, his relationship with his son, and his mission, are discussed elsewhere.

Study questions

1 Work through the bullet points relating to a Roman hero. Find examples from the text of how Aeneas fits the model. Also try finding examples of times when he doesn't.
2 Does Aeneas develop over the course of the epic?

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

R. Deryck Williams, in his book *Aeneas and the Roman Hero* (Macmillan, 1973), says of Aeneas:

> 'Aeneas has to be the social man, the man who through his care for others succeeds in leading his group or his society, not aiming to achieve personal satisfaction by surpassing others in excellence, but to use his qualities in order to achieve their success'.
>
> 'We may all decide personally whether (Virgil) has been successful in his new creation – and may well decide that he has not; but we must not judge Aeneas adversely because we think he ought to be like Achilles'.

Does Aeneas have any concern for 'personal satisfaction'?

EXPLORE FURTHER

To see a more relaxed Aeneas, read Book 5, 104–603 where he presides over games in honour of his dead father.

Aeneas as leader

The Trojans rally to him after the fall of Troy. When they are shipwrecked, he provides food for all his men, and encourages them, keeping his misery 'deep in his heart, and presenting the sculpture on the temple as a cause for optimism. Ilioneus says he has no equal for his piety or care for justice, or in the field of battle. In Book 6, at the burial of Misenus, he 'took the lead in all [the] work, urging on his comrades and carrying at his side the same tools as they'. Does Virgil present him as a faultless leader?

FIGURE 43
Aeneas, the pious Roman, does not take the arms of Mezentius for himself, but dedicates them to Mars.

Aeneas as lover

The subject matter of Book 4 is a relationship, and it is here that we might expect to see Aeneas' emotions. However, Virgil gives us the thoughts and words of Dido, not of Aeneas.

Aeneas' first reaction to Mercury's message is to hesitate and wonder, 'What words dare he use to approach the queen in all her passion? How could he speak to her?' She senses his deception, and attacks him first. His defence is a poor excuse: 'It was never my intention to be deceitful or run away without your knowing.' He claims that he has never offered her marriage or entered into any contract with her. Virgil has not given us any indication of Aeneas' thoughts in Book 4, and so we are in no position to refute what he says. Is he a hero putting duty above affection, or a heartless and fickle lover? His words to the silent Dido in Book 6 perhaps begin to answer those questions.

Aeneas as a family man

The father and son relationship is an important theme in the *Aeneid*, but the only time we witness a scene between father and son alone is when Aeneas is leaving for battle. The scene (Book 12, 432–441) is clearly modelled on that in the *Iliad* where Hector embraces Astyanax. However, Aeneas embraces his son through his helmet. Is this the result of a man suppressing his emotion? A father who does not have the capacity for feeling? A man so intent on his mission that he is unaware of his feelings?

His words are often lacking, but his actions sometimes portray a very human character, who longs for affection. He is exasperated at the impossibility of having a normal relationship with his mother (Book 1, 402–409), and he tries but fails to grasp Creusa in Book 2 and his father in Book 6. His first wish is to return to rebuild Troy, but he is denied that, as he is destined for greater things and must move on.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'What is often perceived as the colourless quality of Aeneas' character is largely the result of the roles forced on him by the plot of the *Aeneid:* rather than being strongly driven by an internal desire or ambition, he is forced into a mission by circumstances beyond his control.'

Philip Hardie, *The Last Trojan Hero. A Cultural History of Virgil's Aeneid* (I. B. Tauris, 2016)

Does Aeneas' attitude towards his mission change after his visit to his father in the Underworld?

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Lyne comments:

> 'It is Aeneas who comes or should come most interestingly and often into contact with other people. But it is his interaction with others that is minimal. In general it is Aeneas' relationships that Vergil appears to neglect. Vergil seems curiously disinclined to show Aeneas responding or relating to others . . . But is this Vergil's neglect? Are we to sense a further voice saying something unobvious?'

R. O. A.M. Lyne, *Further Voices in Vergil's Aeneid* (Clarendon Press, 1987)

Why do you think Aeneas says so little in the *Aeneid*?

ACTIVITY

Devise a graph to monitor Aeneas' high and low points throughout the *Aeneid*.

Although he has an important mission and must found a new race, Aeneas is faltering in his approach. He is often seen 'turning many things over in his mind', or drawing 'a deep sigh from the bottom of his heart'. He stands gazing for too long in the Underworld, and more than once, the Sibyl has to remind him of the time. Too often he waits to be prompted by a visitation from the gods or a dream from his father. Even in the later books, when he is more committed to his mission, he tends to react rather than take the initiative. He avoids conflict, but is a fearsome presence on the battlefield when he fights. Are we irritated by his diffidence, or do we admire his thoughtfulness?

The role of Aeneas in Rome's imperial destiny

The proem tells us that Aeneas is driven on by Fate to reach Italy, and that his arrival will mark 'the beginning of the Latin race, the Alban fathers and the high walls of Rome'.

The message is soon reinforced in Jupiter's speech to Venus. Jupiter explains the line of descent to Romulus and the founding of the city of Rome. At this point, information is given about key moments in Rome's history, leading up to Augustus and the limitless power he will enjoy. The Romans will be 'the rulers of the world'; they will conquer Greece, and Augustus will return from the east 'laden with spoils'. Aeneas is bound to get to his destination, because it is the will of Jupiter and Fate.

Penates – the gods which represent and protect the household and the city

First, Aeneas must lead his exiled Trojans to Italy. It is clear that it is his role and his alone. Hector predicts a great city and entrusts to him the **Penates** of Troy, Jupiter gives him a sign, and Creusa goes so far as to tell him he will find a 'royal bride' in Italy.

The key to success on this journey is his piety, and Aeneas frequently sacrifices to gods and local deities, watches out for signs and goes the way Fate and the gods lead.

Prophecies give him clues but his journey is not smooth – 'I so feared the kingdom of Libya would do you harm,' says a relieved Anchises. He finally sails his ship into Cumae, and arrives on Italian soil.

Study question
Virgil's characters often amplify each other. We understand Turnus and Amata more fully when we look at them through our experience of Dido, for example. As you read, what other characters do you notice who have parallels elsewhere in the poem?

His father gives him his first real idea about the scale of his mission, when he shows him the spirits of the great Roman heroes who are waiting to go up into the world to play their part in Rome's history. Augustus and his empire are the culmination of this imperial destiny.

An explicit link between Aeneas and the Empire is made by the shield given to him. It depicts the defining battle in the civil wars, Actium, in which Antony and Cleopatra were routed, leaving the path clear for Augustus to pursue his imperial destiny.

CHARACTERISATION OF OTHER MAJOR AND MINOR CHARACTERS

Iulus gives his name to the Julian clan, and therefore forms a linguistic (if not genetic) link between Augustus, the adopted great-nephew of Julius Caesar, and Aeneas. This link forms the strong continuity between the Emperor and his divine origins.

Ascanius/Iulus

Book 1, 643–694 (Cupid as Ascanius); Book 2, 671–729; Book 4, 83–85, 156–159, 272–276; Book 7, 107–127, 475–510; Book 9, 246–313, 500–502, 590–663; Book 10, 44–47, 132–138; Book 12, 432–440.

In Book 2, his hair catches fire, a message from Jupiter that they should leave Troy. In the following flight, he is presented as the son that Aeneas must protect, and the description of him winding his fingers in his father's is a touching picture. In Book 4, he is too young to ride in the hunt, and is restricted to the lower valleys. Childlike, he envies the grown-ups and longs to see a fierce lion or wild boar for a bit of excitement. To this extent he is drawn as a realistic child. He is an important element in Jupiter's message: even if Aeneas is not concerned about his own destiny, he should not deprive his son of a kingdom in Italy.

In Book 7, as in Book 1, Ascanius is unwittingly used by an immortal as a vehicle for a plan which will bring death and destruction. In Book 1, Cupid impersonates Ascanius, and his arrow destroys Dido; in Book 7, Juno inspires him to shoot the pet stag, and so ignite the war with the Latins. He cannot be blamed for starting the war, yet the action is not out of character. In Book 4 he had hoped for a lion or boar, and now in Latium, with the appearance of the stag, he sees his opportunity for glory.

Ascanius' tendency towards self-glorification emerges again in Book 9. Aeneas is away seeking help from Evander, and he, still young and inexperienced, is in charge in the besieged camp. When the Latins attack he falls into the role of leader, and is respected by the men. His instinct to send Nisus and Euryalus with a message to Aeneas is correct, but his promise of matrons as a prize seems out of place. Romans, we have been told in Book 6, will be known for being merciful to those they capture. One conclusion to draw is that without his father to guide him, Ascanius lacks the humanity that the 'new' hero should display. His potential for getting carried away with victory and indulging in bloodlust is seen by Apollo, who gives him a talk and keeps him away from the fighting. Should we see in Apollo the restraining figure of Augustus' patron god?

KEY INDIVIDUAL

Julius Caesar

Dates: 100–44 BC

A successful politician and soldier who extended the Roman Empire and then seized power in Rome. In the civil war that followed, he defeated Pompey, but was assassinated in 44 BC by a group of conspirators. They feared that he wanted to abolish the Republic and take all the power for himself, like a king. He adopted Octavian, his great nephew, as his heir. His family traced its lineage back to Iulus.

S & C

W. A. Camps' *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid* (OUP, 1969), Chapter VIII 'Making the Story', discusses the fusion of the legends about Aeneas' coming to Italy.

Anna

Book 4

Anna has her own tragedy. She acts with the best intentions, her words are full of affection and good sense, and, ironically, she is even right when she guesses that Juno is behind Aeneas' appearance in Carthage. But almost everything she does or says harms the sister she loves. She even helps Dido build her own funeral pyre, and at the moment when Dido kills herself, she is absent, arriving only just in time to catch her sister's last breath.

ACTIVITY

Go through Dido's speeches. Look at what she says, and identify all the emotions she goes through as she is speaking. Note too when her words are rooted in good common sense. Give what she says a mark out of ten for how justified you think she is in saying it.

Dido

Book 1, 338–370, 494–756; Book 4; Book 6, 450–476.

She has much in common with Aeneas: they are both refugees and noble leaders of their people; both have lost their spouse; both are manipulated by the gods; both are founding

Study question
How does Virgil use imagery to make the reader feel sympathy for Dido or alienate us from her?

KEY INDIVIDUALS

Octavian, later known as Augustus

Dates: 63 BC–AD 14

After the death of Caesar, Octavian avenged his adopted father's death and eventually, after a struggle with Mark Antony, became the first emperor. When he assumed complete control in 27, he took on the name Augustus.

Mark Antony

Dates: 83–30 BC

The main adversary of Octavian after Caesar's death. He allied himself with Cleopatra and fought Octavian for the leadership of Rome. He was defeated at the Battle of Actium.

S & C Do some research to find literature, art, theatre, music and film which takes Dido as its subject.

Study question
Examine in detail the effects of Allecto's visit to Amata, analysing the ways in which Virgil's language conveys her state of mind.

cities; both are from rich places characterised by gold and rich textiles; in similes they are Apollo and Diana, the divine twins.

But they are also in strong opposition to each other: woman and man; Carthage and Rome (destined to be enemies); victim and hunter; childless and father; passionate and reserved; wild wind and a solid oak; quick to react and slow to react. Some suggest an allusion to Cleopatra and Antony, others propose Cleopatra and Octavian.

Dido is a capable leader, who lays the foundations for her new city in Book 1. She is also a victim: of her brother, who murdered her husband; of Juno and Venus, who manipulate her for their own purposes; of Cupid's arrow, or her own passion for Aeneas; of her sister's advice; of Iarbas, the jealous suitor; of Rumour who presents to the world a sordid affair rather than the marriage Dido believes herself to have entered into; of Aeneas who leaves her; of the foundation of the Roman race, in which Fate gives her no part.

She fits the model of a heroine from a Greek tragedy: she is a good woman who makes a wrong decision, after which she is condemned; she prays to the gods for their approval; she carries on and marries Aeneas, unaware of the consequences of her action; she realises that she has been deceived, and sees death as the only way out. Book 4 is given over almost entirely to her. We know first of the indecision going on in her mind, and later the torments; we wait outside for her to appear for the hunt, as a bride is awaited on her wedding day; we listen to her speeches and are aware of her suicide plans when she is deceiving everyone else about what she is doing.

The Sibyl (Priestess of Apollo)

Book 6.
In many respects she is out of this world, but Virgil also portrays in her a tetchy old woman. She anchors our interest in what is human, as we are taken through a world of phantoms and monsters. She chides Aeneas when he is gazing in wonder at the temple of Apollo, tells Palinurus off, and reminds Aeneas that the phantoms cannot hurt him. Deiphobus tries to calm her when she sharply warns Aeneas of the time: 'There is no need for anger great priestess.'

Her interchange with Charon (295–416) is almost a comic scene. He is aggressively officious as he shouts from his boat at the intruders, and grumbles about his past problems with living bodies. She, instead of proving immediately the legitimacy of their visit, lets him rant, before smugly flashing the golden bough and sarcastically telling him that his dog can bark until the end of time, and Proserpina can remain safe with her uncle!

Latinus and Amata

Book 7; Book 11, 469–485; Book 12, 1–80, 579–613.
Aeneas must marry into the family of Latinus in order to create the new race. The king is of impeccable divine origin, as is appropriate for the ancestor of the Roman people, and at first welcomes Aeneas into his kingdom. But despite knowing that Aeneas is the husband foretold for Lavinia, he cannot resist Amata, and allows war to be declared. In Book 12 he attempts to persuade Turnus to give up Lavinia, but fails and withdraws.

The fault in Latinus lies in his lack of courage to pursue what he knows is required of Fate, and his lack of piety in ignoring the omen brings about his personal tragedy and the destruction of his city.

Amata, understandably, wants her daughter to marry Turnus, the young fiancé who loves her, not an unknown foreigner. Juno exploits her anger, drives her into a frenzy and uses her to stir up war against the Trojans. When she foresees that Aeneas will kill Turnus, she hangs herself in despair.

In portraying the family unit, rather than just Latinus, Virgil is better able to show the destructive force of the war, as husband and wife are on opposing sides. He emphasises that this Italian war is, in essence, a civil war.

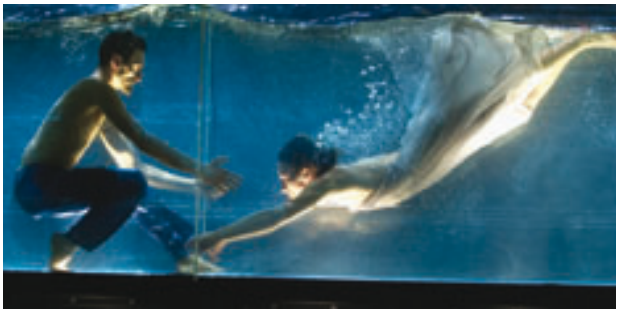


FIGURE 44
Dido dies in the poem, but the character lives on, inspiring writers, musicians and dancers. This photograph shows a 2007 production of Purcell's 1689 opera, *Dido and Aeneas*. The prologue is performed underwater to represent Aeneas' arrival and departure by sea.

Nisus and Euryalus

Book 9, 176–449.

See also Heroes, p. 159ff.

Nisus and Euryalus are minor characters who are significant because of:

- their youth: perhaps the tragedy is that, like Pallas and Lausus, and even Turnus, they are too young and inexperienced for war
- their violent killing: they seem to take pleasure in slaughter
- their lack of piety: Euryalus, like Turnus, is betrayed by the trophies he takes. Such spoils should be dedicated to the gods
- the power of love: Nisus chooses to die for his friend
- their thirst for *kleos*: this is Nisus' reason for volunteering
- their failed mission: unlike Aeneas, or like him, they lose sight of their mission
- the beauty of the description of the death of Euryalus
- being an example of men who are free to act, and bring about their own downfall through their own self-indulgence and greed.

Study question
What comparisons can you draw between: Latinus and Priam, Evander and Anchises?

Amata and Dido?

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read the account of the footrace in Book 5, 290–361.

What are we to make of the cheating? Aeneas seems to condone it. Is it meant to be any kind of indication as to their characters? Is it a foreshadowing of the night-time expedition?

Turnus

Book 7, 406–474; Book 8, 492–504; Book 9, 1–7, 123–175, 530–818; Books 10, 11, 12.

When Aeneas is in the Underworld, the Sibyl tells him that he will have to face another Achilles, another son of a goddess. This prepares us for Turnus. He is a person of standing: a hero who presents a worthy challenge to Aeneas.

Turnus is not unlike Aeneas in many respects. They both have divine help, both are skilled fighters, both men of integrity. Turnus wants to marry the girl he loves and protect his kingdom against invaders who want to settle in his native land. These are valid objectives. It is his misfortune that he has got mixed up in a situation beyond his control: his rival is part of a divine plan which will come about regardless. His own behaviour is manipulated by Juno.

Turnus is discussed also on pp. 160 and 178.

Study question
Examine the conversation that Latinus has with Turnus in Book 12. Who puts the stronger case? For whom do you feel more sympathy?

CLASSICAL LEGACY

Amata joins the angry and aggressive women of literature: the Bacchae, Medea, Lady Macbeth. Can you think of any other women who stir up war?

Mezentius and Lausus

Book 7, 647–654; Book 8, 481–503, 568–571; Book 10; Book 11, 1–16.

Virgil is sparing with his epithets, but he uses one for Mezentius: scorner of the gods, the exact opposite of pious Aeneas. His son, Lausus, is 'known for his beauty', and he 'deserved a father whom it would have been more of a joy to obey'. These essentials sum up the pair.

Mezentius' form of torture, where living men are roped to dead bodies to die a lingering death, is horrific. His own people, the Etruscans, have driven him out, and he has allied himself with Turnus.

Study question
Do you think Nisus and Euryalus deserve to be remembered?

When Mezentius is under attack from Aeneas, Lausus throws himself in the way of Aeneas' spear in order to save his father. Suddenly the world is upside down: the son has saved the father, reversing the role of protector. Aeneas, raging because of the death of young Pallas, is now killing Lausus, a boy of similar age and delicacy to Pallas. Mezentius himself changes too. Devastated by his son's sacrifice to save him, he begins to demonstrate heroic behaviour.

FIGURE 45
'No day shall erase you from the memory of time', the words Virgil says about Nisus and Euryalus, are written at the entrance to the September 11 memorial in New York.

Like the heroes in the Elysian Fields, Mezentius has his horse as his companion. He understands that he is only mortal, and accepts his fate. He is not a coward now that the final test has come. He knows it will be either victory or death. With his helmet gleaming and his hands laden with javelins, he is presented as a hero. Virgil does not show him with feelings of base revenge. We know that he is a monster, but to us Aeneas is perhaps almost the more base character when he throws his spear between the eyes of the horse in order to kill its rider.

Evander and Pallas

Book 8; Book 10; Book 11, 29–99.

Evander is a Greek from Arcadia who had settled on the site of the future Rome before the Trojan War, and founded a city on the Palatine Hill. He has strong bonds with Aeneas through his friendship with Anchises, and his role mirrors that of Anchises. In Book 8, he shows Aeneas the city, just as Anchises had shown him the heroes in Book 6. Evander is pious and leads a simple life, reflecting Roman moral traditions. He entrusts Aeneas with his son, and when Pallas' body is brought back, calls upon Aeneas to avenge the death.

Pallas appears as a young boy when he asks Aeneas questions on the journey, but is capable of giving a rousing speech on the battlefield when the men are dispirited. It is not so much his character as the effect of his death on others that is important.

Adding Evander and Pallas to the story allows Virgil to:

- include a scene in Pallanteum, the future Rome
- show that it is possible for the bonds of friendship to be stronger than the enmity of war (a good lesson to teach after a civil war)
- show a leader with a modest lifestyle (like Augustus)
- show a pious man enacting rituals familiar to Romans
- through the death of Pallas, provide a motive for Aeneas to pursue Turnus with *furor*
- explore the father and son relationship.

Study questions

1 Make a list of all the things Turnus has in common with Aeneas.
2 Make notes on all the similes used of Aeneas and Turnus. How does Virgil use similes to compare their relative strength?

S & C Research Aristotle's definition of a tragic figure. How well does Turnus fit the description?

S & C Research opinions on the ending of the *Aeneid* from as many sources as possible throughout the ages.

Drances

Book 11, 122–131, 336–409.

Gransden in *Virgil, The Aeneid*, calls Drances 'characteristically ambiguous'. He is an example of how Virgil manipulates our reactions to the characters and never gives us easy answers. Turnus is the enemy, but is noble in defending his right to marry the woman he loves; Aeneas is the Roman hero but is cruel; Drances talks sense, but he is arrogant and 'all words', according to Turnus.

Camilla

Book 7, 803–817; Book 11, 498–900.

Camilla is Virgil's invention. She is the last figure in the Catalogue in Book 7, and dominates the second half of Book 11. Like Dido, she defies the traditional woman's role.

When we first meet Dido, she is likened to Diana, Camilla's patron goddess; when we first see Camilla, we are told of the 'royal splendour' of her 'purple veiling' which weaves round its 'gold clasp', reminding us of Dido's appearance on the hunt.

Dido provides a female and emotionally charged episode at the beginning of the poem, and Camilla is a parallel figure at the end. She belongs to nature with her 'Lycian quiver and shepherd's staff of myrtle wood', but is also a warrior, and her staff has the head of a lance. R. D. Williams (*The Aeneid of Virgil: A Commentary Based on the Translation of C. Day Lewis*, BCP, 1985) calls her 'a strange mixture of the beauty of an idyllic pastoral world and the heroic world of violence and cruelty'.

She dies because she is attracted by the exotic gold and purple of the finery of Choreus, a eunuch priest, who himself is killed later by Turnus. Is Virgil making the point that such extravagant wealth has no place in the new Roman civilisation? Is he, as some people think, being dismissive of a female warrior who could not really give her mind to serious fighting because she was 'burning with all a woman's passion for spoil and plunder'?

For the Romans of Virgil's time, perhaps she recalled the spirit of their rural past and the purity that war destroys.

Study question

Look at the imagery used to describe Mezentius in Book 10. How well does it reflect his character?

Study questions

1 List all the qualities of Evander and Pallas that make them good models for the citizens of Augustan Rome.
2 What is the relevance of the Cacus story to the themes of Book 8?

Her death is full of pathos: she dies, like Dido, with one female companion. Her life 'left her with a groan' and 'fled in anger down to the shades' – the exact same words as used for Turnus' death.

Juturna

Book 10, 439–440; Book 12, 134–60, 468–480, 620–649, 843–886.
Like Thetis in the *Iliad*, Juturna is an immortal caught between the worlds of Fate, divine manipulation and love for her mortal family.

Her immortality is a gift from Jupiter as the 'price of her ransomed virginity'. She is a victim on all counts: raped by Jupiter, blackmailed by Juno, and given immortality which consigns her to eternal grieving for her brother.

Virgil could have used any deity to help out Turnus. Using his sister allows him to inject a greater element of human pity: this is no Olympian acting in divine pique, but a sister desperately trying to save her brother.

PORTRAYAL OF WAR

EXPLORE FURTHER

Analyse how Virgil brings out the horror of the outbreak of war in Book 7, 512–539.

Read carefully what Diomede says about war in Book 11.

Virgil was twenty-one when the civil wars began, and forty when they ended with the death of Antony. Thus he experienced war for most of his adult life. He questions the Homeric ideal of unthinking pursuit of war for personal glory. He sees it more as a means to restore civilisation. He does this by showing Aeneas as a hero who avoids conflict.

He interrupts his narrative in Book 7 with: 'I shall speak of wars . . . For me this is the birth of the higher order of things.' Why he should have spoken of war thus is open to question – perhaps because of the great symbolic importance of war in the purpose of the *Aeneid*.

War causes suffering, and civil wars are particularly destructive

Look for examples of:

- war killing the young when their parents are still alive
- mothers losing sons
- fathers losing sons
- brothers dying together
- women as victims of war
- other individual tragedies.

War is a result of the behaviour of human beings

- Examine what Jupiter says about free will in Book 10, 98–115.
- Look at the extent to which Latinus and Turnus are guilty of bringing war upon themselves.

War is represented by images of inhuman and irrational behaviour

- Look particularly at the images in Books 2, 10 and 12. (See Themes pp. 148–153.)

Trojans

Our first view of the Trojans is as victims of Juno's storm, and then we see them on the temple frieze, the victims of the Greeks. The picture of their suffering continues in Book 2, where they are victims of Sinon's trickery compounded by that of Pallas Athene. The emphasis on the suffering of the women clinging to the pillars epitomises their desperate plight and the destruction of the innocent.

Their city is characterised by wealth: gilded beams and richly ornamented ceilings, bronze-plated doorposts, and rich weaving.

As for the Trojans that accompany Aeneas, we have a hazy picture of them. Some are named, but they have no individualism. It suits Virgil to show Aeneas as a solitary figure, carrying alone the burden of his mission. When in Book 4 Aeneas tells the men to get the ships ready, they are delighted, the only indication we have about their feelings.

Their enemies point to their foreign ways: Iarbas mocks Aeneas as 'a second Paris, with eunuchs in attendance and hair dripping with perfume and Maeonian bonnet tied under his chin' (Book 4, 215–217). Remulus makes similar accusations: clothes dyed yellow and purple, a love of dancing, pipes and tambourines, sleeves on tunics and bonnets with ribbons (Book 9, 614–620). Turnus relishes the thought of bringing down the 'effeminate Phrygian' and fouling in the dust 'the hair he has curled with hot steel and steeped in myrrh'. The insult is that the Trojans are effeminate, but nothing in the conduct of the warriors would indicate that they are. Juno is reassured by Jupiter that when the Trojans join with the native Italians, it will be the 'manly courage of Italy' that dominates, and Trojan customs and language will give way to the Latins.

EXPLORE FURTHER

For a discussion of the peoples in Books 7 and 8, see:

James E G Zetzel, Rome and its traditions in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed Charles Martindale (CUP, 1997).

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'Efforts to read the *Aeneid* historically should not get in the way of – indeed, should enhance – the text's contemporary relevance. The issues raised by the Dido episode – sexual ethics, the use and abuse of power, interaction with (and construal of) the other, imperialism, personal choice and historical necessity, or rhetorical spin in the (mis) representation of facts, to name a few – continue to matter.'

Ingo Gildenhard, *Aeneid IV* (Open Book Publishers, 2012)

What specific examples from the *Aeneid* would you choose to illustrate Gildenhard's statement?

FIGURE 46
Aeneas sacrifices to the Penates which Hector had entrusted to him as he left Troy. In front of him is the sow which was prophesied by the oracle.

Greeks

The Greeks are depicted on the Carthaginians' temple, and then in 'reality' in Book 2. They are perfidious and murderous. 'Listen now to this story of Greek treachery, and from this one indictment, learn the ways of a whole people,' says Aeneas. He presents the Trojans as naïve when faced with the trickery of 'the arts of Greece' and all their stratagems.

However, we perhaps see a shift in the perception of the Greeks later on. Evander is from Arcadia and therefore a Greek. Aeneas is aware of this, but considers their bond through courage, holy oracles of the gods, and the kinship of their fathers, to be more binding. They now have a common enemy in Mezentius.

In Book 6, Anchises, looking into the future, pronounces that whereas the Romans will govern the peoples of the world, 'others' (i.e. the Greeks) will excel in sculpture and rhetoric. The enemy of the future for Aeneas' Trojans is not Greece, but Carthage. Perhaps Virgil is voicing here the reconciliation of the Augustan age with their former enemies.

ACTIVITY

For those wanting exciting entertainment, descriptions of killings provide some compelling, though bloodthirsty, incidents. We know from the popularity of amphitheatres that human slaughter was a spectator sport, and there must have been some people for whom the gruesome killings in Books 10 and 12 were the highlight. Find your top five gory descriptions in the *Aeneid*, and put them on file for use in essays.

Carthaginians

Carthage is mentioned in the first few lines as being dear to Juno and destined to be overthrown by 'rulers of a great empire' i.e. Rome. This gives the motivation for Juno's determination that Aeneas should never arrive in Italy. If she can prevent Rome from being founded, Carthage will be safe.

Carthage is the setting for Books 1 to 4. The city is still in the process of being built. This is significant because it shows that it is not yet established, and so for Dido, an alliance with Aeneas would make good political sense. She is an exile and in a potentially very vulnerable position: she is surrounded by hostile tribes and needs guards at her frontiers.

That this is a civilised city is confirmed when we meet Dido, who is giving laws and rules of conduct to her people, and dividing up the work to be done. The people of Carthage are choosing sites for buildings, drawing up laws, electing magistrates, laying the foundations for a theatre and excavating a harbour. It sounds like the construction of

a Roman city. The bee simile sums up the purposeful activity and regulated social structure of the Carthaginians.

Great wealth and luxury are prominent in Carthage, as they were in Troy. The spacious banquet hall is rich with a gold-coffered ceiling, embroidered couches and purple draperies, and bowls are of silver or gold. It is lit with flaming torches, and there are hundreds of serving women and slaves.

For the Romans of Virgil's time, Carthage holds memories of victory over Hannibal, and perhaps patriotic implications of Augustus' founding of Nova Carthago. It is also in North Africa. And Augustus would not be averse to Virgil's giving a town in North Africa a high profile, given that he was keen for people to be reminded of his victory over Egypt.

FIGURE 47
Despite his defeat, Hannibal lives on! A railway station in Tunisia near the site of Dido's Carthage.

Italians

Fate says that Aeneas has to marry a native Italian bride and found a new race. We know, because the Sibyl has predicted it, that there will be much bloodshed first. The Italians themselves are already on the brink of war when he arrives, and those who want to prevent Mezentius from imposing his tyrannical rule are pleased to have a strong ally in the Trojans.

Latinus, the Laurentine king, has reigned peacefully for many years. He is the son of the god Faunus and grandson of Saturn, He, like Aeneas, has seen his child's hair catch fire in a divine communication, and has received a prophecy about marriage with a stranger. When Aeneas arrives, Latinus offers *xenia* and is ready to give him Lavinia as his bride. So keen is Virgil to present Latinus as an ancestor that he presents his city in terms which resonate with Augustan Rome: there is a building with a hundred columns on the highest point of the city; in the courtyard the image of two-faced Janus; Latinus' grandfather wearing a toga.

ACTIVITY

The power of stories: the she-wolf is still a potent symbol in Rome. Research its uses in modern Rome, and produce a class collage of images.

Pallanteum, the city of Evander, is on the site of the future Rome, and Aeneas is shown sites which will in the future be familiar landmarks. The people share the traditional Roman values which Augustus is trying to promote.

In Book 7, there is a catalogue of all the tribes which are fighting against Aeneas. The people are described variously as showering acorns of blue lead from slings, using

ACTIVITY

Make a list of the major participants in the war, showing the name of the leader, tribe and allegiance, for example:

Leader	Tribe	Allegiance
Camilla	Volsci	Turnus

S & C

Livy, another writer of the Augustan period, wrote a history of Rome. Books 21–30 are about the war with Hannibal.

FIGURE 48
Vulcano Solfatara, Bay of Naples, Italy. Virgil's descriptions of places in Italy are based on real locations. This photograph of Solfatara recalls the description in Book 7 of the oracle 'breathing thick clouds of sulphurous vapour'.

boomerang-type weapons or half-moon bronze shields, and wearing tawny caps made from the hides of wolves, a boot on just the right foot or cork oak helmets. Some have special skills, such as the priest who could charm snakes, or interesting backgrounds, like Virbius, the son of Hippolytus, and, of course, Camilla, the warrior maiden. The names of the places they come from were established towns in Augustan times, and Tibur, Praeneste and Nomentum, for example, would be familiar to Virgil's audience. There would, presumably, have been some sort of patriotic thrill in hearing your home town mentioned in a great epic!

TOPIC REVIEW

1. How does Aeneas differ from a Homeric hero?
2. To what extent is Aeneas an admirable character?
3. How do the characters reflect Virgil's interest in the family?
4. How do the characters reflect Virgil's concern with settling in a new country?
5. What is Virgil's attitude towards war?

Further Reading

R. Deryck Williams, *Aeneas and the Roman Hero (Inside the Ancient World)* (Bloomsbury, 2013)
K. W. Gransden, *Virgil: The Aeneid (Landmarks of World Literature)* (CUP, 2004)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Passage A: *Aeneid* Book 7, 341–358

In that moment Allecto, gorged with the poisons of the Gorgons, went straight to Latium and the lofty palace of the king of the Laurentines and settled on the quiet threshold of the chamber of Amata. There the queen was seething with womanly anger and disappointment at the arrival of the Trojans and the loss of the wedding with Turnus. Taking one of the snakes from her dark hair, the goddess Allecto threw it on Amata's breast to enter deep in her heart, a horror driving her to frenzy and bringing down her whole house in ruin. It glided between her dress and her smooth breasts and she felt no touch of its coils. Without her knowing it, it breathed its viper's breath into her and made her mad. The serpent became a great necklace of twisted gold round her neck. It became the trailing end of a long ribbon twined round her hair. It slithered all over her body. While the first infection of the liquid venom was still oozing through all her senses and winding the fire about her bones, before her mind in her breast had wholly consumed the fever of it, she spoke with some gentleness, as a mother might, and wept bitterly over the marriage of her daughter to a Phrygian.

Trans: David West

1. How effectively does Virgil portray the power of the Fury over Amata? [10]
2. Anchises says, 'Your task, Roman (will be) . . . to pardon the defeated and war down the proud'. To what extent does Aeneas fulfil this task? [30]

3.3 The Social, Cultural and Religious Context

TOPIC OVERVIEW

- moral values implicit in the *Aeneid* including *pietas* (duty to gods, state and family) and its contrast with *furor*
- importance of fate and destiny
- role of the immortals and the relationship between mortals and immortals
- family and friendship
- relationships between men and women, parents and children
- part played by women in the epic and their position in society

The following prescribed sources are covered in this topic:

- Virgil, *Aeneid*, Books 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Remember that you will be given credit in the exam if you study extra sources and make relevant use of them in your answers.

This topic focuses on the values which are conveyed through the epic: the behaviour of individuals in the social context and the part played by the gods and fate.

pietas – doing the right thing for the gods, one's family and society

The moral values implicit in the *Aeneid* include ***pietas*** (duty to gods, state and family) which is contrasted with *furor*.

The traditional moral values of the ancestors were thought to be what had made Rome great. The politics of the late Republic had revolved too much around individual power, and in the civil wars people had lost sight of these moral values:

- a sense of knowing your position in the great scheme of things, seeing the importance of what you have inherited from the ancestors, respecting the position you are in and playing your part.
- being constant or steadfast in what you do, persevering and keeping your eye on your goal even when things are difficult.
- moderation, exercising self-control, and avoiding extravagance.

Study question
Go through the list of moral values, and find examples of them being adhered to, and of people deviating from them. Remember to examine all the characters, not just Aeneas himself.

EXPLORE FURTHER

Where is Cato mentioned in the Aeneid? Research Cato the Elder in order to understand more about traditional Roman moral values.

PIETAS

The epithet *pius* is used of Aeneas throughout the *Aeneid*. As the founder of the Roman race, he should honour the gods and family and do the right thing for his people. It is easy to find examples of him making sacrifices and vows and showing respect to the gods. In Book 1, he introduces himself as 'Aeneas, known for my devotion'.

Hector's message is that Aeneas should leave Troy and take the city's sacraments and household gods with him. However, he cannot as his father, Anchises, refuses to leave. To abandon his father would not be the action of a pious son. The solution comes in a sign from Jupiter. The image of Aeneas, personifying piety, with his son holding his hand, and his father on his shoulders bearing the sacred gods of Troy, was one well known in the Roman world.

In Book 4, Aeneas is told to leave Carthage. He follows the commands of the gods, but at the expense of Dido, whom he heartlessly abandons – at least, that is how most people interpret Book 4. Is it possible that we should admire him for putting his religious piety above human feelings? To what extent is Virgil's contemporary audience likely to have reacted in the same way as we do to his leaving her?

FIGURE 49
Aeneas carries Anchises and leads Ascanius out of Troy, in this sculpture by Bernini.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

'Aeneas' general concern to facilitate fate is the cornerstone of his *pietas*.'

C. J. Mackie, *The Characterisation of Aeneas* (Scottish Academic Press, 1988)

If this is the case, his leaving Dido was an act of piety. What do you think?

EXPLORE FURTHER

Read about the rites to honour Anchises in Book 5 for a greater understanding of the concept of piety.

For some examples of Aeneas' piety, see:

Book 2, 650–729: Aeneas and his family leave Troy.
Book 6, 212–235: The burial of Misenus.
Book 6, 679–702: Anchises' account of his son's piety.
Book 7, 135–147: Aeneas makes offerings on reaching his destination.

Book 8, 67–78: Aeneas honours the gods after the dream from Tiber.
Book 10, 825–830: Aeneas' reaction to the death of Lausus.
Book 11, 1–11: Aeneas makes offerings to Mars.
Book 11, 59–90: Preparations for the funeral of Pallas.
Book 11, 100–121: Agreement to the truce.
Book 12, 161–194: Swearing an oath.
Book 12, 311–317: Aeneas is reluctant to break the vow he had made.
Book 12, 432–440: Aeneas' farewell to Ascanius.
Book 12, 950: If piety means keeping an oath, then killing Turnus is a pious act, because Aeneas is fulfilling his promise to Evander.

FUROR

furor – irrational, uncontrolled behaviour

Furor is mad or irrational behaviour, the opposite of the civilised and controlled way in which the ideal Roman should conduct himself.

In Book 1, 148 Virgil uses a simile which features a clash between *furor* and *pietas*. Neptune's calming the storm is likened to the way a good man can calm an angry crowd. The simile is unusual in that it reverses the usual pattern – a force of nature is being likened to human behaviour. It suggests that *pietas* can overcome *furor*, and this is an important theme of the *Aeneid*. *Furor* is used in Jupiter's speech to Venus to describe the civil wars that Rome will suffer. Was Virgil's audience meant to see Augustus as that wise statesman who, through *pietas*, was able to impose order on Roman politics after the civil wars?

Furor is used frequently in Book 4 to describe Dido. It is used for her passionate love, and also for her anguish and the madness that drives her to suicide.

Furor is used also of Amata after the visitation from Allecto, of Pygmalion and his killing of Sychaeus for the treasure, of the madness that makes the Trojans let the horse in and the frenzy of the Sibyl.

Furor is the rage which drives Homeric heroes to kill. It drives Achilles to avenge Patroclus, to show no remorse for Hector and to pay no attention to the civilised practice of allowing the enemy a decent burial. It drives Turnus and Aeneas too.

Like the Greek heroes in the *Iliad*, Turnus rushes into battle for personal glory. However, he is a victim, and his *furor* comes through the action of Allecto, who 'threw a burning torch at the warrior' so that 'in a frenzy of rage he called for his armour'. Throughout the fighting, the images of him are of a wild animal, raging torrent or uncontrollable fire. Mezentius shows similar *furor* in battle. It is a quality we associate with the enemies of Aeneas.

However, Aeneas himself is prey to it too. Seeing the Greeks overcoming Troy, he says, 'Frenzy and anger drove me on.' The simile that follows of hungry wolves reflects the inhuman desperation which inhabits them in their fighting. A moment of *furor* overcomes him when he catches sight of Helen. He wants to kill her, not for the sake of justice but from anger and revenge, and this is what makes it *furor*. It is only Venus questioning his 'raging passion' that stops him killing her. A few minutes later, as he rushes back to the battle with the cry 'Today we die. But not all of us shall die unavenged', it is Creusa who throws herself in front of him, reminding him that it his duty to protect his household.

He gives way to *furor* when he avenges the death of Pallas. He 'harvests with the sword' everything before him, bursting with rage and 'flushed with slaughter'. His cruelty defies all the decent behaviour we could expect of the ancestor of the Romans, whom the poem is supposedly praising. He saves two sets of four brothers for a human sacrifice to Pallas' shade, kills Magus who is begging for mercy, slaughters a priest of Apollo, and mocks Tarquitus, the son of Faunus. His *furor*, then, takes him beyond normal the normal cruelty of war into behaviour which transgresses civilised behaviour and is an insult to the gods themselves.

Book 12 sees Aeneas again in the grip of *furor*. When the truce has been broken he 'roused himself to savage slaughter and gave full rein to his anger'. This anger seems to abate when Turnus begs as a suppliant for his life, asking him to take pity on his ageing father. At the end of the *Iliad* Achilles had forgotten his wrath, and was united with Priam in the sorrow of bereavement and the bond between son and aged parent. There is every opportunity for Aeneas to show the same humanity and spare Turnus. There is nothing in fate to prevent it since Turnus has renounced Lavinia. However, he sees the sword-belt of Pallas and 'burning with mad passion and terrible in his wrath', he plunges his sword into Turnus' breast.

It would be easy to condemn him for his act of inhumanity, but in killing Turnus, he is doing what Evander had begged. As a leader, he is in an impossible situation. R. D. Williams suggests that Turnus represents a barbaric and antique way of life which can have no part in the new civilisation. Rome's mission, according to Anchises, was to 'cast down the proud'. Turnus has been proud, and he has been cast down. But does he have to be killed? Romans will also, Anchises says, be merciful to the conquered.

Why does Virgil portray his hero as he does? He bears the epithet 'good' or 'pious' throughout the *Aeneid*, but even a hero, Virgil seems to say, can lose self-control and behave ignobly. The unthinking pursuit of glory may have been the goal of a Homeric hero, but things are not the same in the times of Augustus.

Augustus himself states in his *res gestae*: '. . . as victor I spared the lives of all citizens who asked for mercy. When foreign peoples could safely be pardoned I preferred to preserve rather than to exterminate them.' Suetonius' description, 'After his victory in the . . . he showed no clemency, sending Brutus' head to Rome to be flung at the feet of Caesar's statue, and ranting at the noblest of his prisoners' (Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 2, 13, translation Kline), would indicate rather more *furor* in his behaviour.

Perhaps Virgil is pointing out that no leader can gain and maintain power without compromising his ideals.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FATE AND DESTINY

The word 'fate' is connected to the Latin word for 'speak', and so it has the meaning of that which has been said, or pronounced, by a god. Venus calls Jupiter 'You who rule the affairs of gods and men with your eternal law', and the other immortals accept that Jupiter's will always prevails. The Sibyl reprimands the unburied Palinurus: 'You must cease to hope that the Fates of the gods can be altered by prayers.' Dido dies 'before the decree of Fate', so Iris has to make a special journey to release her from her body.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Jasper Griffin comments on complaints that there is no neat conclusion to Book 12: 'The effect, haunting, complex, and in harmony with the rest of the poem, is deliberate.'

(Jasper Griffin Virgil, in the *Past Masters* series, OUP, 1986)

To what extent does Virgil's lack of comment on Aeneas' action at the end of the poem add to the effectiveness of the *Aeneid*?

Jupiter

Book 1, 223–304; Book 2, 689–704; Book 4, 219–237; Book 10, 1–117; 466–472; 606–632; Book 12, 725–727, 791–886.

Jupiter embodies the notion of Fate in the *Aeneid*, and is responsible for its execution.

From the proem we know that Aeneas is subject to a fate which will determine his destination. He pursues his mission because he knows it is fated. Turnus and Latinus, on the other hand, go against Fate, with tragic consequences.

In Homer, the gods frequently intervene in the action, and there is a sense that, with the agreement of Zeus, Fate is not perhaps immutable. Fate in Homer seems to relate mostly to the time of a man's death, rather than his actions in life.

While Jupiter in the *Aeneid* ensures the fulfilment of Fate, he does sometimes, it seems, get distracted, allowing attempts which aim to divert or postpone the inevitable. When Iarbas points out Aeneas' presence in Carthage with Dido, Jupiter cares nothing for the indignation of his son, but acts swiftly to put Fate back on course.

Juno is aware that Jupiter will always have the last word, but that does not stop her from meddling. Jupiter tells her, when she wants to save Turnus, 'If what you ask is a stay of the death that is upon him and respite for a young man who must die, and if you accept that this is what I ordain, then rescue Turnus.'

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

Gransden in *Landmarks of World Literature: The Aeneid* (CUP, 1990), explains:

> 'Certain events are predetermined, though the precise moment and circumstances remain flexible, and this flexibility allows for the continued operation of human free will and for the persistence of a pluralistic theocracy within the larger framework which had evolved as conceptual thought became more sophisticated after Homer.'

Does the knowledge that Aeneas is destined to beat Turnus and marry Lavinia make the poem more or less engaging for the reader?

When Jupiter feels it necessary to establish his position, he decrees: 'let each man face his own fortune and set his course by his own hopes. Trojan and Rutulian alike . . . as each man has set up his loom, so will he endure the labour and fortune of it . . . The fates will find their way.' This flexibility is important: without it the characters would be like puppets, and the poem would risk being devoid of any real characterisation or drama.

Fate is a useful device for Virgil in his praise of Augustus. It gives him a context within which he can refer to the future and highlight events, such as the closure of the Gates of War, the doors of the Temple of Janus.

Study questions

1 At the very end of the poem, why does Aeneas decide to kill Turnus?
2 Is he forced to by Fate?

The Immortals

The gods in the *Aeneid* are anthropomorphic (depicted in human shape) as they were in Homer's epics and in Greek art. This was the tradition, and it does not mean that Virgil believed literally in gods who lived on a mountain in Greece and occasionally swooped down to earth to intervene in human affairs. We must remember, too, that Virgil is using the gods to play a role in a poem, and we should not necessarily expect religious dogma or philosophy.

Who are the immortals?

The immortals include:

- gods from Mount Olympus
- native Italian gods
- minor gods and nymphs
- deities that inhabit particular places
- forces such as the Furies.

ACTIVITY

Below is a list of immortals from the *Aeneid*. Some have major roles; others may be mentioned just once in a simile, for example. Say as much as you can about each name on the list.

- Aeolus
- Allecto
- Anubis
- Apollo
- Aurora
- Bacchus
- Carmentis
- Circe
- Cupid
- Cybele
- Diana
- Faunus
- Hercules
- Iris
- Janus
- Juno
- Jupiter
- Juturna
- Mars
- Mercury
- Neptune
- Pallas Athene
- Saturn
- Thybris
- Venus
- Vesta
- Vulcan

Juno and Venus

Juno: Book 1, 12–141; Book 4, 90–172; Book 7, 286–600; Book 9, 1–24; Book 10, 1–117, 606–688; Book 12, 134–160, 791–886.

Study question

Professor Stephen Harrison, in his Oxford University video-clip on the *Aeneid*, calls Juno the typical 'soap opera bitch'. Use evidence from the text to justify this comment.

CW

Venus: Book 1, 223–417, 657–694; Book 2, 588–623; Book 4, 90–128; Book 6, 187–197; Book 8, 370–406; 608–616; Book 10, 1–117; Book 12, 411–429, 554–556, 786–787.
Juno is the driving force behind Aeneas' troubles in the *Aeneid*. She begins Book 1 with an angry outburst about Aeneas' success in approaching Italy, and goes on to cause the war. However, in Book 12 she is reconciled to his settling there.

Like Homeric gods, Juno and Venus have all the human vices. They are significant to the narrative because they represent opposing ambitions, and support Turnus and Aeneas, respectively. They provide, through their ability to send a Fury or heal a wound at will, a means for Virgil to move the plot in unexpected ways.

Their conversations are full of cunning of the worst sort, their individual schemes disregarding totally the consequences for mortals. They play a game of one-upmanship, with Juno confident that she has the higher authority because she is the wife of Jupiter, and Venus sure that she will be able to manipulate her dear father. When Jupiter calls them to account, as he does in the council of gods in Book 10, it is an opportunity for him to assert the power of Fate, and Virgil to reassert Aeneas' role in Rome's imperial destiny.

ACTIVITY

In class together, study the conversations between the two goddesses in Book 4 and Book 10. Then act them out, using your own words and any gestures you feel are appropriate.

Apollo

Book 4, 141–150; Book 6, 56–97; Book 9, 638–663.
Apollo intervenes in the action only once, when he prevents Ascanius from continuing to fight in Book 9. His presence, as god of prophecy and archer god, however, is felt throughout the epic.

THE ROLE OF THE IMMORTALS

The plot

It is immortals who drive the main events in the plot:

- Jupiter ensures that Fate is followed.
- Juno puts obstacles in Aeneas' way: the storm, marriage with Dido, the war with the Latins, the intervention of Juturna.
- Venus protects Aeneas in Carthage and Troy, makes Dido fall in love with him, stops him killing Helen, helps him find the golden bough, brings him a shield, and heals his wound.

They enact their own drama on Olympus, giving the *Aeneid* another tier of action:

- Juno and Venus (step-mother and daughter of Jupiter) vie to get his approval for their plans and are suspicious of each other. In Book 10, they argue like two squabbling children about who is responsible for the trouble Aeneas is in.
- In Book 12, Jupiter sees Juno watching the fighting from a golden cloud. 'What do you hope to achieve by perching there in those chilly clouds?' he asks.

Study questions

1. Examine the Aeneas and Apollo simile in Book 4. Apollo's beauty is stressed, but note too the arrows which 'sound on his shoulders'. Why does Virgil add this detail?
2. Why is Apollo important in Book 6?
3. What is Augustus' connection to Apollo? Is it significant?

They create excitement and suspense. An immortal can appear at will and intervene in the action. The audience can never be sure that things will go to plan:

- Venus stops Aeneas killing Helen.
- The ships-turned-nymphs warn Aeneas of the danger the camp is in.
- Juno removes Turnus from the battle by luring him away with a phantom of Aeneas.
- Apollo comes down from his cloud to restrain Ascanius.
- Faunus makes Aeneas' spear get caught in the tree stump.
- Venus removes the arrow head from Aeneas' leg.
- Juturna replaces Turnus' chariot-driver.

They can represent human experience, and be seen as symbols.

When people in the *Aeneid* act under the influence of an immortal, they never act out of character:

- Mercury appearing to Aeneas could be interpreted as his conscience suddenly striking him, Cupid's arrow simply as falling in love.
- When the flame licks the head of Iulus in Troy, it is a 'light bulb moment' – Anchises realises that he has to leave the city.
- The description of the 'wedding' in the cave could be one of divine intervention with Juno and the nymphs, but equally a description of a real storm, or the storm of passion.
- Amata being controlled by Allecto could be seen as giving in to the anger she already feels.

FIGURE 50
Venus arrives to help Aeneas, who has been wounded.

They are a poetic expression. Poetry involves using the art of words to recreate an image or idea.

- After Dido's death, Iris, the rainbow goddess, comes to collect a lock of her hair, a suitably calm and beautiful image after the turmoil of her anguish and suicide.

The gods are an important tool in the delivery of moral and political messages. The presence of Jupiter as Fate reinforces the purpose of Aeneas' mission.

- In Book 2, the flame on Ascanius' head and shooting star are signs that Anchises must leave Troy.
- Jupiter's message brought to Aeneas by Mercury in Book 4 reinforces his duty to make for Italy.

The gods are symbolic of the continuity of the Roman state:

- Jupiter promises Juno that the new race will pay her honour.

FIGURE 51
Juno sends Iris, the rainbow goddess, to collect a lock of Dido's hair for Proserpina, and in so doing release her spirit.

- The Roman gods already have a shady presence in Evander's Pallanteum.
- Aeneas traditionally brought to Italy the sacred relics from Troy which were later housed in the Temple of Vesta in the Forum. The message to Romans was that the divine fire from Troy was still alive in Rome.

The gods are important in the expression of political allusions. The gods, being immortal, can see the future:

- Jupiter's speech to Venus in Book 1 tells of the glorious empire under Augustus.
- The shield made by Vulcan tells the story of important events in Rome's history, and in particular of the Battle of Actium.
- Jupiter's speech to Juno Book 12 discusses the nature of the new people that will be created.

The presence of Venus is a reminder that Augustus through Iulus can trace his ancestry to the gods. She:

- pleads for Iulus' safety (Book 10)
- allows Aeneas to return safely to his family (Book 2).

Juno is a reminder of Rome's Italian origins:

- In Book 12, Jupiter tells Juno she will be honoured by a new unified race.

The presence of gods on both sides shows that both are pious:

- Latinus is descended from Faunus, and receives a sign similar to the one Anchises received in Troy.
- Faunus punishes the Trojans for their impious behaviour in cutting down a sacred tree.
- Camilla is beloved by Diana.

S & C For further discussion of the gods, read W. A. Camps, *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid* (OUP, 1969)

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MORTALS AND IMMORTALS

Immortals communicate with mortals in several ways, including through:

- appearance, either as themselves or in the shape of another person
- sending a lesser immortal with a message
- sending a sign, usually in the sky
- sending false signs to confuse them
- prophets
- dreams.

ACTIVITY
Find examples for each of the ways that the gods communicate with men, and men with gods.

Mortals communicate with immortals through:

- vows
- sacrifices
- prayers
- consultation with a prophet
- face-to-face meetings, in special cases.

Study questions

Which immortal:

1 is intent on stopping the mortal acting badly
2 is not involved, but is merely acting on instructions
3 feels that the mortal deserves help
4 has a moral purpose
5 is working to bring about the divine purpose of Fate or Jupiter
6 is working to thwart the intentions of Fate or Jupiter
7 is quite aware that the mortal will suffer through their intervention?

FIGURE 52
A wall-painting from Pompeii showing the genius or spirit of the household in the middle, and the household gods at his side. Aeneas brought the gods of Troy to Italy.

THE FAMILY

The family is important to the *Aeneid*:

- The father-son relationship reflects the continuity of the Roman race. Aeneas' father and son allow him to look backwards and forwards.
- Family relationships give potential for maximum pathos in highlighting the cruelty of war.
- Most families will have been affected by the deaths of loved ones in the civil wars, and are likely to be engaged by the issues raised by the presentation of families in the *Aeneid*.

- The tracing of Augustus' line back to Iulus is a key theme of the *Aeneid*.
- Families can span the human and the divine: the immortals have family relationships which add another level of complexity to the story, and the Aeneas–Venus relationship highlights the huge burden that Aeneas carries of being a hero.
- Augustus was keen to promote the family as part of his reforms (see p. 196).
- Augustus saw himself as the father of the country, and promoted the worship of the genius of his family.

Relationships

husband and wife
mother and son
father and son
father and daughter
brothers
sisters
brother and sister
ancestor and descendant
father-in-law and son-in-law
step-mother and step-daughter
uncle and nephew
great uncle and great nephew/ adopted son
potential mother-in-law and son-in-law
potential father-in-law and son-in-law
brothers-in-law

Characters

Achilles and Neoptolemus
Aeneas and Creusa
Aeneas and Dido
Aeneas and Lavinia
Aeneas and Iulus/Ascanius
Aeneas and Venus
Aeneas and Augustus
Aeneas and Anchises
Aeneas and Silvius
Apollo and Diana
Camilla and Metabus
Dido and Anna
Dido and Sychaeus
Dido and Pygmalion
Euryalus and his mother
Evander and Pallas
Iulus/Ascanius and Augustus
Julius Caesar and Pompey
Julius Caesar and Augustus
Jupiter and Juno
Jupiter and Venus
Jupiter and Iarbas
Latinus and Turnus
Latinus and Amata
Latinus and Lavinia
Latinus and Faunus
Lausus and mother
Lavinia and Silvius
Marcellus and Augustus
Mezentius and Lausus
Priam and Cassandra
Priam and Hecuba
Priam and Polites
Priam and Hector
Turnus and Juturna
Turnus and Amata
Turnus and Daunus

and slightly more demanding names to recognise and place:

Jupiter and Hercules
Lucagus and Liger
Tarquitus and Dryope
Larides and Thimber
Io and Inachus
Brutus and his sons
Turnus and Remulus.

FRIENDSHIP

The family has a much stronger presence than friendship in the *Aeneid*. *Xenia* (guest-friendship, see p. 63) is important in three episodes.

Dido and Aeneas

When Aeneas' men arrive in Carthage, with the ships wrecked, they approach Dido as suppliants. She is quick to offer them protection.

ACTIVITY

You can do this activity individually or in groups.

- Assign the correct relationship to each pair in the list above. This is a good revision exercise.
- Find references to the relationships in the text.
- Explain in one sentence why Virgil has included each relationship. Your reason might be something like 'It illustrates the extent of Aeneas' *furor* and the cruelty of war' or 'It demonstrates the importance of the bond between father and son'.
- Once you have found reasons for the inclusion of the characters, group them into categories.
- Add any other relationships of your own, together with what they add to the *Aeneid*.

Discuss your findings and make additional notes. Keep these notes, as the content could form the basis you need for an essay question.

It is this friendship that Aeneas refers to in his short speech to her, with his impersonal, 'I know, O Queen, you can list a multitude of kindnesses you have done me.' Guest-friendship is a good refuge from facing up to the truth.

Latinus and Aeneas

Ironically, Latinus greets the Trojans with words of friendship: 'Do not refuse the guest-friendship we offer you . . .' This makes their going to war even more tragic.

Evander and Aeneas

Aeneas has no qualms about approaching the Greek Evander, because the bonds that link them through friendship are much stronger than the enmity engendered by past wars. The bond is particularly strong because it spans the generations and was sealed with gifts. Anchises had given Evander a quiver, a cloak and a pair of bridles, things he has now passed on to his son Pallas.

The friendship of Nisus and Euryalus

They set out keen for glory, but Euryalus is captured and killed. The picture of Nisus pleading for his young friend's life, the sword piercing Euryalus' youthful white breast, and Nisus hurling himself onto his friend's body to die, is a moving tribute to their friendship. Like Achilles and Patroclus, they are portrayed as lovers.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

S & C To explore further these relationships, see: Ellen Oliensis, Sons and Lovers: sexuality and gender in Virgil's poetry, in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed Charles Martindale (CUP, 1997).

The husband and wife relationships we witness are at points of crisis, and any analysis must take that into account. Hecuba is protective of the old and weak Priam, and seems to take the initiative, telling him to sit by her at the altar. They appear a devoted couple, though we must resist making too many comparisons with modern relationships. Priam has fifty sons and daughters, and therefore must have a good few concubines in the palace.

We meet Creusa just as the Greeks are reaching the family home, and not unnaturally she prevails upon her husband to protect them all. The spotlight, however, is on the three generations of father and son: 'Young Iulus can walk by my side and my wife can follow in my footsteps at a distance,' says Aeneas, not even mentioning her by name. Aeneas, perhaps, has little interest in telling Dido more about their relationship.

There is no place for her on his mission. In her final speech she pronounces his fate – 'prosperity is waiting for you, and a kingdom and a royal bride', and after one reminder to him not to fail in his love for their son, she disappears from the epic.

Amata seems to have a strong voice in the question of her daughter's marriage – perhaps, it has been suggested, echoing the strong women behind the power in Roman politics. In any case, their relationship serves the purposes of the plot, and Amata's role is to cause Latinus to retreat and allow the war to happen.

Virgil's account of the Dido and Aeneas episode is so one-sided that it is not easy to discuss their relationship as lovers. We know in detail her feelings, but the first insight we get into Aeneas' state of mind is when he is defending his decision to leave. She becomes the irrational, destructive force, the *furor* in opposition to his *pietas*, and this is the essence of their relationship in the scheme of the *Aeneid*. The roles are reversed in the underworld, when she is 'grim-faced' and cold as marble, and he is left gazing after her 'with tears' (Book 6, 450–477).

Dido seems to flourish much more when she is not in a relationship with a man. When she is in Tyre focusing on her husband's death, she is 'sick with love'. When Aeneas

arrives in Carthage, she runs around in a frenzy of passion for him, and all her building work comes to a halt. However, Dido without a man is a formidable power. She takes the treasure, leads the escape from Tyre, negotiates some land, builds a city and runs it efficiently. And when Aeneas has left, she can rationally sum up her achievements: I 'have founded a glorious city and lived to see the building of my own walls. I have avenged my husband and punished his enemy . . .' Relationships with men seem to suppress her real qualities. A Roman, of course, might well believe that it is in a woman's character to behave irrationally, and that she is acting unnaturally when she is strong and independent.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Aeneas' relationships with his father and his son are essential to the *Aeneid*. However, we have very little evidence as to how Aeneas relates to his family.

It is the family bond between the generations, the responsibility one has for the other and the respect to be shown to elders that is more Virgil's concern.

Aeneas looks up to Anchises. He will not abandon his father in Troy, and even after his father has died, Aeneas still seems to rely on him. He tells Dido that his father has been continually warning him in dreams to leave for Italy. When he visits the Sibyl to get Apollo's prophecies, he asks to make the journey to see his father. The wisdom of the forefathers is precious, and very relevant in a poem in which a return to traditional values is a key theme.

The only scene we get which shows the human warmth between them is in the Underworld, a cruel reminder of the finality of death: Aeneas stretches out his arms out to hug his father, but the insubstantial ghost slips through his grasp. The image is made more poignant for being a repetition of what happened when Aeneas met the ghost of Creusa. The fact that it is his father who shows him the parade of Roman heroes reinforces the sense of continuity between the age of the heroes and Augustan Rome.

The relationship between Aeneas and Ascanius is best summed up the scene in Book 12. He kisses his son affectionately (but through his helmet, with no great show of emotion), and instils in him the importance of following the good examples of his elders. 'From me, my son, you can learn courage and hard toil. Others will teach you about fortune. My hand will now defend you in war and lead you where the prizes are great.'

Aeneas' has no real relationship with his mother. As he says in frustration when she appears in Book 1, 'Why do you so often mock your own son by taking on these disguises? You are cruel. Why am I never allowed to take your hand in mine, to hear your true voice and speak to you as you really are?' She intervenes to help him throughout the story, but never engages with him as a mother.

Ascanius makes a brief reference to Creusa in Book 9, when he promises that he will care for Euryalus' mother as though she were his own. As it is, when she laments for her son (Book 9, 474–502), Ascanius sends her back into the house because she is 'fanning the flames of their grief'.

Virgil does not explore the relationship between Amata and Lavinia, but shows a very strong bond between Amata and Turnus, who addresses her as a mother (Book 12, 55–81).

The relationships of Mezentius and Lausus, and Evander and Pallas are discussed on p. 168.

THE PART PLAYED BY WOMEN IN THE EPIC AND THEIR POSITION IN SOCIETY

The most memorable mortal characters in the Aeneid are, for most people, Dido, Camilla and Amata. Not only are they vividly presented in terms of psychological make-up, but they act with daring and impose their own wills on the man's world of the hero. Without them the *Aeneid* would lose much of its emotional intensity and dramatic action. Aeneas is viewed in literature throughout the ages more in relation to Dido than as a Roman hero.

It is the two female immortals, Juno and Venus, who dominate activity on Olympus, and who are vividly characterised.

Despite these outstanding independent and feisty creations, women in the *Aeneid* are defined in relation to men. They are wives, widows, mothers, daughters, sisters or victims of war. We have a limited view of them in the *Aeneid*.

S & C For a broader view of women in antiquity, see Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (Schoken Books, 1998).

As victims of war

Study questions

1. What human emotion dominates Dido and Amata's behaviour?
2. What imagery does Virgil use to express their state of mind?
3. What is the consequence of their action on society, their families and themselves?
4. To what extent does Virgil treat them sympathetically?

The first group of women we meet are the Trojan women portrayed on the sculpture of the temple to Juno in Carthage. Like the women in the *Iliad*, they are going in supplication to the temple of Athene, their hair unbound and beating their breasts.

In Book 2, the image is repeated as Aeneas recounts the fall of Troy: 'Frightened mothers were wandering through the palace, clinging to the doorposts and kissing them.' Cassandra, daughter of Priam, hands tied, is dragged away. Hecuba and her daughters are sitting 'flocked round the altar like doves driven down in a black storm'. In Book 7, when the Latin women hear the signal for war, 'terrified mothers pressed their babies to their breasts'.

In Book 9, Virgil gives us a cameo picture of the mother of Euryalus. She laments that she has not had the opportunity to wash her son's wounds, dress his body with her lovingly woven cloak or bury his body. Her words are a reminder of the sorrow which afflicts all families in war.

We revisit the grief of Euryalus' mother in Book 10 after Aeneas kills Lausus. This time, the mother has given her son a garment to wear, a tunic which she had woven for him with a soft thread of gold. The folds of it are now filled with blood. Virgil does not show us the reaction of this mother, but forces us instead to draw upon the parallel image in Book 9, making the scene even more poignant. A grieving mother is a very effective way of highlighting the evil destructive force of war, whether it is a Trojan or an Etruscan who is killed.

S & C Read Euripides' *Medea*, and compare Medea's speeches to Jason with those of Dido to Aeneas.

The theme of wailing women is repeated in Book 11, mirroring Books 1 and 2. First the Trojan women lament the death of Pallas, then the mothers of Pallanteum set the city ablaze with their cries, and finally the mothers, wives, children and sisters of Latinus' city wail and beat their breasts. Later, Amata and Lavinia take offerings to the temple of Pallas, as Hecuba and the Trojan women do on the temple frieze.

Virgil creates pathos for the women victims of war, and yet in Book 9, Ascanius promises Nisus 'twelve chosen matrons' as a reward. Virgil could be saying that in war, even the 'good' side acts with callous disregard for women. Or he may be making the point that in the absence of Aeneas, the new 'Roman' way of treating the enemy with mercy has been forgotten.

Women and marriage

Lavinia is destined to marry Aeneas. One blush is as far as she gets in expressing herself in the *Aeneid*. She does not have to make any moral decision – that is her father's problem – and as a young girl still she is not subject to the over-emotional outbursts of her mother. It is almost as though she does not exist, except as an object to be fought over. Romans were used to arranged marriages, and would not have found her silent acquiescence as unsettling as the modern reader might do.

Women as objects

Women are often perceived as objects to be traded. Iarbas seems to think he should have first option on Dido, Juno offers Aeolus a nymph in exchange for the storm, and Ascanius promises Latin matrons to Nisus. Juturna was raped by Jupiter, and given the unwanted gift of immortality in return.

Women and emotional instability

Allecto, the personification of destructive jealousy, is female. The defining quality of women in the *Aeneid* seems to be their irrationality or *furor*, and consequent tendency to upset the male order of things.

Dido and Amata are obvious examples.

Can we tell anything about Virgil's attitude towards women from the *Aeneid*? For example, Hermes says, 'Women are unstable creatures, always changing', and the skilful, brave and heroic Camilla 'burning with all a woman's passion for spoil and plunder' is brought down by a weakness for a rather nice embroidered cloak and tunic!

CLASSICAL LEGACY

Ursula Le Guin wrote a novel called *Lavinia*, in which the young princess has her say.

The idea of rewriting a well-known story from the woman's point of view is not a new one. Ovid, a contemporary of Virgil, wrote the *Heroides*, verse letters in the voice of aggrieved heroines of Greek and Roman mythology, including Dido.

Adèle Geras has written a novel called *Dido*.

For the *Odyssey* from a feminist viewpoint, see Margaret Atwood's *Penelopiad*.

FIGURE 53
This sculpture shows a Bacchant, or Maenad, ecstatically dancing, her hair loose and her head tilted back as she follows the ritual worship of Dionysus.

TOPIC REVIEW

1. What moral values are considered important?
2. How important are women to the plot, themes and poetry of the *Aeneid*?
3. How is the importance of the family emphasised?
4. How important are the gods to the plot, themes and poetry of the *Aeneid*?

Further Reading

W. A. Camps, *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid*, Appendix 1 (OUP, 1969)
K. W. Gransden, *The Aeneid (Landmarks of World Literature)* (CUP, 1990)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Passage A: *Aeneid* Book 12, 930–952

He lowered his eyes and stretched out his right hand to beg as a suppliant. 'I have brought this upon myself,' he said, 'and for myself I ask nothing. Make use of what fortune has given you, but if any thought of my unhappy father can touch you, I beg of you – and you too had such a father in Anchises – take pity on the old age of Daunus, and give me back to my people, or if you prefer it, give them back my dead body. You have defeated me, and the men of Ausonia have seen me defeated and stretching out my hands to you. Lavinia is yours. Do not carry your hatred any further.'

There stood Aeneas, deadly in his armour, rolling his eyes, but he checked his hand, hesitating more and more as the words of Turnus began to move him, when suddenly his eyes caught the fatal baldric of the boy Pallas high on Turnus' shoulder with the glittering studs he knew so well. Turnus had defeated and wounded him and then killed him, and now he was wearing his belt on his shoulder as a battle honour taken from an enemy. Aeneas feasted his eyes on the sight of this spoil, this reminder of his own wild grief, then, burning with mad passion and terrible in his wrath, he cried: 'Are you to escape me now, wearing the spoils stripped from the body of those I loved? By this wound that I now give, it is Pallas who makes sacrifice of you. It is Pallas who exacts the penalty in your guilty blood.' Blazing with rage, he plunged the steel full into his enemy's breast. The limbs of Turnus were dissolved in cold and his life left him with a groan, fleeing in anger down to the shades.

Trans: David West

1. Using this passage as a starting point, discuss the importance of *furor* in the *Aeneid*. [20]
2. To what extent are mortal women in the *Aeneid* portrayed sympathetically? [30]

3.4 Historical and Political Background

TOPIC OVERVIEW

- Augustan context in which the *Aeneid* was produced including:
  - the political and historical background of the civil war
  - Augustus' rise to power and consolidation of his rule
- Virgil's relationship to Augustus and his regime and the extent to which they are promoted within the epic
- promotion of the Roman Empire

The following prescribed sources are covered in this topic:

- Virgil, *Aeneid*, Books 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

Remember that you will be given credit in the exam if you study extra sources and make relevant use of them in your answers.

This topic aims to give basic information about the political background to the epic and to explain textual references to contemporary events and people. Understanding the historical context will help the learner to make a decision about the extent to which politics is an important element of the *Aeneid*.

S & C

For a fuller picture of Roman politics, see:

Mary Beard, *SPQR: A History of Ancient Rome* (Profile Books, 2016)

Mary Beard and Michael Crawford, *Rome in the Late Republic* (Duckworth, 2000)

Pamela Bradley, *Ancient Rome, Using Evidence* (Hodder, 1990)

AUGUSTAN CONTEXT IN WHICH THE AENEID WAS PRODUCED

The chart below briefly sets out the events which lead up to the Civil Wars before the Augustan period.

Political and historical background to the civil war

The column headed '*Aeneid* references' highlights for you the things to look out for as you read.

Event	Consequences	*Aeneid* references
264–146 BC: The Romans are busy with the Punic Wars, i.e. the wars against the Carthaginians, including the defeat of Hannibal. 146: Carthage destroyed.	The Punic wars dominate Roman foreign affairs. Romans are aware of problems in the East, but not very active until about 200.	Dido's curse. Fabius the delayer fought Hannibal. Scipio the Elder defeated Hannibal in 202. Scipio the Younger destroyed Carthage in 146.
214–146: Macedonian Wars. They start by Rome supporting Greece against Philip of Macedon and end with Rome conquering Greece and destroying Corinth.	Tremendous wealth flows into Rome from the treasures seized in the wars and the taxes imposed on the conquered countries. New customs, literature and philosophy spread to Rome. Claims that wealth and luxury are undermining traditional Roman values. The gap between the rich governing classes and the poor increases, and instability among the rulers. More importantly, oligarchic equality acquires cracks and fissures. Large areas of land are bought up by the rich and farmed by slaves. Returning soldiers and poor farmers move to the cities. Overcrowding. Weakening of patriarchal units.	Notice the descriptions of rich possessions and decor of the Trojans and Carthaginians. Compare that with the simplicity of Evander's lifestyle. Mummius sacked Corinth.
133: Civil unrest in Rome: hundreds killed; veterans unhappy; Senate wants more wars and more money, not concerned with welfare of state.	Tiberius Gracchus attempt reforms but are defeated.	
123: Gaius Gracchus' reforms.	After the reforms: some increase in small farms, but still problems with land; tribunes (officials who support the interests of the people) have more power to protect the poor; public assemblies have power. Senate less powerful. Overseas colonies set up to alleviate crowded conditions. Corn dole set up for citizens. Equites have more power. Attempts to extend citizenship to Latin allies, and Latin status to Italian allies, fail.	'Who would be without the Gracchi? (Book 6) They are mentioned because they promoted the role of the tribune, the supporter of the people, a role that Augustus was pleased to hold.

(*Continued*)

Event	Consequences	*Aeneid* references
119–78: Civil war between Marius and Sulla.	They establish that a man with an army behind him can march on Rome and intimidate the Senate.	
63: Catiline plots to overthrow Rome. Cicero speaks against him in the Senate. Catiline is killed. 60: Caesar, Pompey, Crassus rule together. 53: Crassus dies. 49: Caesar declares War on Pompey. Pompey defeated.	Caesar becomes dictator for life. Some politicians want a return to the Republic; others realise that a new system is needed to rule an empire.	Catiline on shield. Julius Caesar and Pompey in pageant Book 6. Caesar is Octavian's (Augustus') great uncle and adoptive father.
55: Caesar is assassinated by conspirators including Brutus.	Octavian is named Caesar's heir. Civil wars continue.	Brutus (ancestor), Octavian (Augustus) in Pageant. Octavian and Antony on shield.

Augustus' rise to power and consolidation of his rule

There was unrest in Rome after the murder of Caesar, and Mark Antony, who was Caesar's fellow consul at the time, took control. He agreed with the Senate that Caesar's murderers should be given an amnesty, and that Caesar's will should be read in public.

When the people heard that Caesar had left money to the poorer citizens, they felt very positive towards him. Octavian returned to Rome and was surprised to find that he had been made Caesar's heir. He paid the people the money Caesar had left them, and gained popularity through his action. He vowed to avenge his great uncle's death and be a great leader himself.

Octavian was popular with the people and with his uncle's veterans, putting him in a strong position. For a while, Octavian and Antony worked together with another leader called Lepidus to set the state in order and attack the republican armies of Brutus and Cassius, Caesar's murderers. They were savage in eliminating politicians who were against them, and over 2,000 republican supporters were killed by them, including Cicero. In 42, Brutus and Cassius were killed at the battle of Philippi.

Now that the republicans had been defeated, the struggle was between Antony and Octavian. Antony allied himself with Cleopatra and had a strong power base in the East. The Italian towns and cities, together with important provinces such as Africa, Spain and Gaul, swore allegiance to Octavian.

In 31, Antony and Octavian fought at Actium, and Antony and Cleopatra fled. After Actium, Octavian:

- sent Agrippa, Octavian's right-hand man, back to Rome to settle the troops who were becoming restless because they wanted payment
- invaded Egypt. Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide. He treated most of Antony's supporters leniently, but killed Ptolemy Caesar, Cleopatra's son by Julius Caesar and Antony's eldest son
- gained all the wealth of Egypt for Rome
- travelled to the eastern provinces to establish his authority there.

In 29, Octavian closed the gates of the Temple of Janus, a symbol that Rome was finally at peace. This was the first time in 200 years that they had been closed.

He returned to Rome to a big public triumph, and then set about restoring order. He:

- established that internal peace was to continue, and reduced the number of legions, settling veterans in colonies with a pension
- shared the consulship with Agrippa
- annulled the proscriptions that had been made in the past
- removed disreputable senators, but did not expel any just because they had been supporters of Antony
- encouraged religious practices
- provided the people with entertainment
- began his building programme.

Virgil began the *Aeneid* at about this time. There is no evidence to say that he wrote it at the request of Augustus.

From 27, Augustus:

- declared that he was restoring the republic
- encouraged a return to traditional Roman values
- adopted the name Augustus (meaning revered one), and *princeps* (first citizen)
- renounced all his powers (the Senate objected and continued to elect him into the consulship, as he knew they would)
- revived simple rural festivals and encouraged the worship of local deities
- continued his building programme
- introduced laws to improve public morality
- built himself a 'modest' house on the Palatine and encouraged simple living
- celebrated the secular games in 17 to mark the beginning of a new golden age (after the death of Virgil, but presumably known to him)
- encouraged promotion of his regime through literature and art.

Virgil's relationship to Augustus and his regime . . .

Virgil was born in 70 BC in the north of Italy, just outside Mantua. The area was in Cisalpine Gaul (the part of Gaul on the Italian side of the Alps), which received Roman

EXPLORE FURTHER

For more information on Augustus' achievements, see his own summary which he wrote to be displayed on his tomb, the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti: The Achievements of the Divine Augustus* (OUP, 1969) edited by Brunt and Moore, or the account of his life by the imperial biographer, Suetonius in *The Twelve Caesars*, translated by Robert Graves (Penguin, 2007).

Remember that much of what you will read about will have happened after the death of Virgil.

FIGURE 54
A gold coin showing the head of Apollo, Augustus' patron god. When is Aeneas likened to him?

citizenship status from Julius Caesar only in 49. Caesar was about to embark on a civil war, and he was keen to attract as much support as possible. Virgil would not, therefore, have taken citizenship for granted, and his awareness of what it meant to be Roman could well have had influence on the *Aeneid*.

He was brought up in the countryside, and his love of nature is obvious in his *Eclogues* or Pastoral poems, *Georgics*, a verse work about farming and in the *Aeneid* itself. He moved to Rome to study rhetoric, law and philosophy, and witnessed at close hand the effects of political unrest in Rome caused by Pompey's controversial appointment as sole consul; Caesar's crossing the Rubicon and the beginning of the civil wars; the dictatorship and assassination of Julius Caesar; the rise of Antony, and arrival on the scene of the young Octavian; the defeat of the conspirators at Philippi and the death of Cicero; the wars between Antony and Octavian, and the latter's defeat at Actium in 31.

His poetry brought him to the attention of Maecenas, adviser of Augustus and wealthy patron of the arts. The first poem in his *Eclogues*, published in 37, is thought to express his thanks to Octavian (later known as Augustus) for having restored to him his family farm, which had earlier been appropriated for war veterans. In his *Georgics*, published in 29, he acknowledges the support he has had from Maecenas, and declares: 'Yet soon I will gird myself to celebrate the fiery fights of Caesar', anticipating the *Aeneid*, on which he would work for the rest of his life.

Virgil was not a politician, and preferring a peaceful life, moved away from Rome to the countryside near Naples. Civil war had been raging for much of his life, and it is natural that he should feel some gratitude to Augustus for bringing a period of peace, as well as for the patronage he received from Maecenas.

His works were literary masterpieces, inspired by Theocritus, Hesiod and Homer, but taking on the Roman context and embodying the spirit of Virgil's times. His *Eclogues* touch on some of the trials of a peasant during a time of disorder, the *Georgics* look to a life on the land far from the foreign luxuries of the city, and the *Aeneid* tells of a Roman hero and the horror of the war that is pushed upon him.

The question asked about the *Aeneid* is to what extent it is a work dominated by a desire to please Augustus.

EXPLORE FURTHER

See: R J Tarrant, Poetry and Power: Virgil's poetry in contemporary context in *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil*, ed Charles Martindale (CPU, 1997).

S & C You can follow up by reading P. A. Brunt and J. M. Moore, *res gestae: The Deeds of the Divine Augustus* (Oxford, 1969) (available to read online) CW

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

These two statements by Jasper Griffin are equally valid and express something of the challenge of analysing Augustus.

> 'The chaotic and shameful period of civil wars was giving place to the enlightened supremacy of one man, divinely chosen, who would restore peace and order to Rome and the world.'
>
> 'The uncontrolled domination of a man whose whole career was illegal, whose first act had been to raise an army and march on Rome, who had signed the lists which proscribed innocent citizens, committed unforgotten crimes in the civil wars, and climbed to tyranny over the bodies of his enemies and the ruin of the constitution.'
>
> Jasper Griffin, *Virgil in Past Masters* (OUP, 1986), Chapter 4, 'The *Aeneid* and the Myth of Rome'

To what extent does praise of Augustus and his regime dominate the *Aeneid*?

. . . and the extent to which they are promoted within the epic

The extent to which the *Aeneid* is a work to promote Augustus is still a matter of discussion. There are:

- passages which are unequivocal praise of Augustus, where he is mentioned by name and his achievements are referred to.
- references which could be veiled praise of Augustus
- passages which are in line with Augustus' policies, such as respect for the traditional ways or the importance of the family unit, but could be there because they are sentiments which Virgil wants to express anyway
- some think that the character of Aeneas is based on Augustus. Would that necessarily mean that he was being promoted?

ACTIVITY

As you read the text, keep referring to these notes. They will help you to appreciate some of the political connotations

The notes below explain points in the text which refer, or might refer, to Augustan politics. The question of whether Virgil was praising or criticising Augustus is still a matter of lively debate.

Where there is a supporting reference in the *res gestae*, it has been included for interest. Students are not required to know the *res gestae*.

Book 1

13 The reference to Carthage hits a patriotic note. Romans were proud of their victory in the Punic wars and the destruction of Carthage. Scipio appears in the

procession of heroes in Book 6. Anything which is patriotic will highlight common ground, and help with the unification after the civil wars

148ff The simile likening the calming of the winds by Neptune to a noble Roman calming a mob can be seen as a reference to Augustus addressing the population in the civil wars. Augustus was sometimes portrayed as Neptune in art.

158 Why does Virgil decide to make Aeneas land in North Africa? Perhaps we should have Egypt in the back of our minds, and Actium.

229ff Venus asks why her son has to suffer, and Jupiter's answer is one of the key passages about Augustus and the empire. Virgil manages to fuse the two legends about the origins of Rome, those of Aeneas and Romulus, so that they both get a place in the foundation story. The Aeneas link is important because then, through Iulus, Augustus can trace his origins back to Venus. (The temple to Venus in Rome is important in his propaganda.) Phrases such as 'I have given them an empire that will know no end', 'rulers of the world' and 'bound his empire by Oceanus at the limits of the world and his fame by the stars' are references to the extent of the empire. Augustus is mentioned by name. Victories in Greece and 'spoils of the East' reflect the riches gained from the victories. The Augustan peace is praised in the words 'wars will be laid aside' and 'dread gates of war . . . will be closed'. The toga was used to celebrate the Roman character –the more folds the better – and so is mentioned here.

378 Aeneas introduces himself as 'known for my devotion' and says he has the gods of his home, the Penates. He is the pious figure representing Augustus' desire to return to traditional religion. Augustus built a new temple to house the Penates.

418ff The emphasis on building a new city will perhaps recall how Augustus is rebuilding Rome.

457 The scene of the fall of Troy may recall the civil wars, and the fact that Augustus has brought peace.

562ff Dido explains that she is obliged to post guards because of harsh necessity. Augustus has had to be harsh through necessity.

638 Here and elsewhere there are descriptions of purple and gold and rich fabrics. These are the riches of the East – the things that have been flooding into Rome and making Romans too materialistic. Carthage will be destroyed. Is Virgil making some sort of comment about extreme luxury not being good?

Book 2

66 Could the references to the infiltration of the Greeks into Troy imply any similarity to the way Greek customs and culture have entered Rome? Augustus wants to return to traditional Roman values, but Greek culture is superior in so many ways.

290ff Aeneas is told to take the gods of Troy with him. Augustus wanted to use the gods and religion to remind citizens of traditional Roman religion and values. Vesta was seen as important by Augustus in her role of safeguarding Rome.

Book 4

143 Augustus' patron god was Apollo. He built a temple to Apollo in 28 BC next to his house on the Palatine. Is this why Aeneas is likened to Apollo here?
To what extent are we meant to see Dido as Cleopatra and be reminded that Antony forged an unholy alliance with a foreign queen rather than remain loyal to the ideal of Rome?

Book 6

69 Aeneas vows to build a temple of solid marble to Phoebus Apollo – as Augustus had just done.

756ff The purpose of the pageant of heroes is to show Aeneas how great the Romans will be, by focusing on the greatest characters in Rome's history. Several references relate directly to Augustus.

772 The oak wreaths (awarded to Romans who had saved a citizen's life in battle) may be a reminder that Augustus had been honoured with a civic crown of oak leaves as a perpetual honour in 27 BC.
'I was named Augustus by decree of the senate, and the door-posts of my house were publicly wreathed with bay leaves and a civic crown was fixed over my door.' (*res gestae*)

789 Straight after Romulus, Augustus is mentioned, the juxtaposition emphasising his importance. Romulus founded Rome. Augustus has founded a 'new' Rome at peace.

792 He is the 'son of a god' – either of Venus through Iulus, or the son of his adoptive father, Julius Caesar, who had been deified.

793 He will bring back the golden years – praise for the Augustan Peace.

794 'The Indians and the Garamentes': Embassies from kings in India were frequently sent to me; never before had they been seen with any Roman commander.' (*res gestae*)

798 The 'kingdoms round the Caspian Sea' are a reminder of Augustus recovering the standards from the Parthians.
'I compelled the Parthians to restore to me the spoils and standards of three Roman armies and to ask as suppliants for the friendship of the Roman people. Those standards I deposited in the innermost shrine of the temple of Mars the Avenger.' (*res gestae*)

799 'Quaking at the prophecies': Suetonius tells us that there were prodigies before the birth of Augustus, a sign that he was no ordinary man.

800 The 'mouths of the Nile' is a reference to Augustus' victory over Antony and Egypt.
'I added Egypt to the empire of the Roman people.' (*res gestae*)

801ff The comparison of Augustus with Hercules and Bacchus is obvious flattery.

824 The Drusi are mentioned – perhaps because they are the family of Livia, Augustus' wife.

830 The father and son-in-law are Julius Caesar and Pompey. Reference to the civil wars is a reminder that Caesar beat Pompey, and Augustus brought an end to the civil wars.

'In my sixth and seventh consulships [28–27 BC], after I had extinguished civil wars, and at a time when with universal consent I was in complete control of affairs, I transferred the republic from my power to the dominion of the senate and people of Rome.' (*res gestae*)

851 Anchises says that the task of the Romans is to govern the peoples of the world with their empire: is this an endorsement of Augustus' power?

853 Impose a settled pattern upon peace, to pardon the defeated and war down the proud: this is what Augustus says about his achievements in the *res gestae*:

'I undertook many civil and foreign wars by land and sea throughout the world, and as victor I spared the lives of all citizens who asked for mercy. When foreign peoples could safely be pardoned I preferred to preserve rather than to exterminate them.'

860ff Great prominence is given to Marcellus, because he is a favourite nephew and heir of Augustus.

874 Augustus' mausoleum is included to glorify Augustus.

FIGURE 55
A reconstruction of the Mausoleum of Augustus. It has such iconic power that even in the twentieth century Mussolini wanted to be buried in it.

Book 7

The naming of particular places emphasises roots, and encourages the peoples in Italy after the civil wars to see themselves as united by common ancestors.

162 As the Trojans approach the city of Latinus, they see warriors exercising. This could be meant to recall the Campus Martius in Rome, an area of the city which Augustus had made his own with new buildings and facilities.

170 The description of the Palace of Laurentine Picus bears a close resemblance to the Temple of Jupiter on the Capitol as rebuilt by Augustus

180 The image of two-faced Janus is anachronistic, but included as a reminder of Augustus' closing the gates of the temple to symbolise peace.

186 The reference to prows of ships nailed to the posts of temple doors is perhaps a reminder of Augustus' victory in the naval battle at Actium.

187 Picus is wearing a short toga. According to Suetonius, Augustus commanded the aediles to allow no one into the Forum until he had removed his cloak and put on a toga. In Book 1, the Romans are referred to as 'the race that wears the toga'.

605ff The reclaiming of the standards from the Parthians is a direct reference to the achievement of Augustus, as is the reference to the doors of the Temple of Janus.

> 'It was the will of our ancestors that the gateway of Janus Quirinus should be shut when victories had secured peace by land and sea throughout the whole empire of the Roman people; from the foundation of the city down to my birth, tradition records that it was shut only twice, but while I was the leading citizen the senate resolved that it should be shut on three occasions.' (*res gestae*)

Book 8

Book 8 is set on the site of the future Rome, and mention of sites and buildings with which the contemporaries of Virgil were familiar from their everyday lives must have inspired some patriotism and awareness of their roots. They would have recognised the altar of Hercules by the Tiber, the Carmentine Gate, the Asylum, the Lupercal, the house of Tarpeia, temple of Janus and the Capitol.

190ff The worship of Hercules and festival in thanks for the deliverance of Rome from a monster is thought by Camps (in *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid*, OUP, 1969) to be a reference to Augustus delivering Rome from Antony and civil war. A parallel is drawn between Hercules and Augustus in Book 6.

285 Camps suggests that the Salii are mentioned only because Virgil is alluding to Octavian/Augustus's triumph in 29 BC at which they were present.

360 The simplicity of the palace of Evander suggests the simplicity of Augustus' house on the Palatine.

616ff The shield is placed under an oak tree, another possible reference to 27 BC when Octavian/Augustus was honoured with a golden shield in the senate house, and the oak-crown was fixed for ever above his door.

The shield itself is the most important explicit section of Augustan propaganda, and merits detailed analysis.

The civil war that is already in progress between the Etruscans and Rutulians, caused by the savage Mezentius, could recall memories of the civil war and Antony.

Book 9

There are no obvious references to Augustus, though the fact that Ascanius gets his warning about moderation from Apollo could be significant, given that Apollo is Augustus' patron god.

Book 10

There are no direct references to Augustus, but Aeneas' displays of *furor* may well be an oblique reference to violent actions that are sometimes unavoidable in war.

Pallas is perhaps an echo of Augustus' nephew Marcellus from Book 6, the young man who died before fulfilling his potential.

The strong father/son portraits may help to reinforce Augustus' family laws.

MODERN SCHOLARSHIP

The relief celebrating the victory over the Parthians shows Apollo and Diana, the sun and moon. Zanker comments: 'The astral gods, with their perpetual rising and sinking, symbolise eternity . . . The princeps who wears this new image of victory on his breastplate becomes the representative of divine providence and the will of the gods' (Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, University of Michigan, 1988).

To what extent does the relief on the breastplate celebrating the victory over the Parthians tie in with the images used of Augustus in the *Aeneid*?

Book 11

There are no obvious references to Augustus.

The funeral of Pallas is described in terms of a Roman state funeral, and may be an allusion to the funeral of Marcellus.

Book 12

819ff Jupiter and Juno establish the nature of the new race. This is not explicit propaganda, but the references to the Latin language, kings living on from generation to generation, manly courage and worshipping the gods are all in line with his vision of Rome under the Augustan peace.

PROMOTION OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

The Roman Empire is referred to. But is the power of Rome being promoted? Tarrant in the Cambridge Companion to Virgil chooses 'ambivalence' as a term to describe Virgil's outlook.

Jupiter's speech to Venus in Book 1

Note all the phrases which refer to the size of the empire.

Procession of heroes (Book 6)

The procession (often referred to also as a pageant) is composed of famous heroes, but it is interesting to see why Virgil might have chosen these particular examples. Their qualities reflect those which Augustus is promoting.

FIGURE 56
The breastplate from the statue of Augustus from the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta *c.* 20 BC. Research the meaning of the images on it.

S & C For a detailed examination of the evidence for Augustan propaganda in art, see Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus* (University of Michigan Press, 2002).

See Amanda Claridge, *Oxford Archaeological Guide to Rome* (OUP, 1998) for discussion of Augustus' building programme and an examination of the remains which can still be visited in Rome, including the **Ara Pacis**.

Ara Pacis – an altar to peace commissioned by Augustus in 13 BC. It depicts the figures of Rome and Peace, processions and religious rituals and scenes from Rome's history, including a figure thought by some to be Aeneas sacrificing the piglets.

Person	Relevance to Augustus
Silvius	Son of Aeneas.
Silvius Aeneas	Awarded oak wreathes and Civic Crowns – like Augustus.
Romulus	Gave name to Rome. His name is next to that of Augustus.
Numa (king with white beard)	Gave Rome laws – good to be associated with him. Augustus too has brought law and order.
Brutus	Ancestor of Brutus, the murderer of Caesar. Augustus killed Brutus at the Battle of Philippi and so avenged Caesar.
Drusi	Ancestors of his wife, Livia.
Pompey and Caesar	Good to remind people how bad the civil wars were – and how Augustus has brought peace. Pompey was Caesar's enemy.
Conquerors of Greece	Augustan Rome was to be a new Athens in its cultural life.
Cato	Strict and traditional. Good role model.
Gracchi	Were pro the people, as Augustus wants to appear.
Scipio	Conqueror of Carthage, a hero.
Fabricius	Incorruptible, despised luxury.
Serranus	A farmer, and farming is to be encouraged.
Marcellus	Ancestor of his nephew Marcellus.

FIGURE 57
This theatre was first planned by Julius Caesar, but was unfinished when he died. Augustus took over the project and dedicated it to his nephew Marcellus, who died in 23.

ACTIVITY

Make a list of the places that are mentioned in the procession of heroes. Write down next to each place how it relates to Augustus' imperial conquests.

The shield

In Book 8, Aeneas is presented with a shield made for him by Vulcan at his mother's, Venus' request. The idea of a hero being presented with a shield comes from the *Iliad*, but it is also likely that the description in the *Aeneid* would have reminded people of a golden shield that had been presented to Augustus, and placed in the Senate House.

Along with Jupiter's speech in Book 1 and the procession of heroes in Book 6, it is a key example of praise for Augustus and Rome.

EXAM TIP

If you fix in your mind the details from the shield gathered in the activity above, you will be able to use them in essays and get marks for detailed knowledge.

ACTIVITY

Search pictures of:

- some geese, a wolf, two babies, a pig, some dolphins, four horses, two snakes, dead bullocks
- a woolly hat, a flame, a star, a garland, a tambourine, a torn cloak, a whip, gifts
- the River Tiber with a bridge, a temple, some ships, a white marble temple and altars
- a group of young women at a sporting event, some French people wearing gold, a dancing priest, a man with a dog's head (Anubis)
- Catiline, Cato, Augustus, Agrippa, Antony, Cleopatra.

Now, with Book 8 lines 626–732 in front of you, assemble the scene on the shield as described by Virgil. Add any background of city, sea or underworld as appropriate.

ACTIVITY

From the description in Book 8, list the images on the shield under these headings:

- Augustus/good
- Antony/evil
- Roman legend
- good Roman historical figures
- bad Roman historical figures.

CLASSICAL LEGACY

The *Aeneid* with its one morally aware traveller making for a promised land was easily adopted by the Christian church, and Aeneas has flourished for 2,000 years in many great epics with lofty themes.

But let us look now to one modern work familiar to millions which may owe something to Virgil and the *Aeneid*.

A hero forever trying to grasp insubstantial parents; a reluctant hero thrown into quests he would rather avoid; a hero who has to visit other worlds where he is enlightened about the future, who looks to birds for messages . . .

One has to wonder, would a three-headed dog have been guarding the trapdoor without Cerberus? Would the divination teacher have been called Sybill without our Sibyl? Would Harry have buried the faithful Dobby with so much gravitas without the lesson from Aeneas' burial of Misenus? Would the Inferi have inhabited an underground lake without the model of Avernus? Would Hermione have thought of using the plant dittany without Venus's expert knowledge to follow, and would Harry's passport to a quick meeting with his parents have been a golden snitch, without the lesson from the golden bough? And was Aeneas *really* wearing an invisibility cloak when he travelled unseen through Troy, and did Hagrid model himself on Charon as he punted the boat across the lake? . . .

EXPLORE FURTHER

Research the marble votive shield in the museum at Arles. It is a copy based on the golden shield given by the Senate to Augustus in 27 and displayed in the Senate.

TOPIC REVIEW

1. What evidence is there of reference to Augustus and his achievements in the *Aeneid*?
2. In what ways does the story of the *Aeneid* mirror events in Rome in Virgil's time?
3. Do the political references dominate the poem?

Further Reading

M. Beard, SPQR*: A History of Ancient Rome* (Profile Books, 2015)
C. Martindale (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Virgil* (Cambridge University Press, 1997)
A. Wallace Hadrill, *Augustan Rome* (BCP, 1993)

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

Passage A: *Aeneid* Book 8, 685–708

On the other side, with the wealth of the barbarian world and warriors in all kinds of different armour, came Antony in triumph from the shores of the Red Sea and the peoples of the Dawn. With him sailed Egypt and the power of the East from as far as distant Bactria, and there bringing up the rear was the greatest outrage of all, his Egyptian wife! On they came at speed, all together, and the whole surface of the sea was churned to foam by the pull of their oars and the bow-waves from their triple beaks. They steered for the high sea and you would have thought that the Cycladic islands had been torn loose again and were floating on the ocean, or that mountains were colliding with mountains, to see men in action on those ships with their massive, turreted sterns, showering blazing torches of tow and flying steel as the fresh blood began to redden the furrows of Neptune's fields. In the middle of all this the queen summoned her warships by rattling her Egyptian timbrels – she was not yet seeing the two snakes there at her back- while Anubis barked and all manner of monstrous gods levelled their weapons at Neptune and Venus and Minerva. There in the eye of the battle raged Mars, engraved in iron, the grim Furies swooped from the sky and jubilant Discord strode along in her torn cloak with Bellona at her heels cracking the bloody whip. But high on the headland at Actium, Apollo saw it all and was drawing his bow. In terror at the sight of the whole of Egypt and of India, all the Arabians and all the Shebans were turning tail and the queen herself could be seen calling for winds and setting her sails by them. She had untied the sail-ropes and was even now paying them out.

Trans: David West

1. How does Virgil use this description to discredit Antony? [10]
2. To what extent would you say that the promotion of Augustus' regime is Virgil's main aim in the *Aeneid*? [30]

What to Expect in the AS Exam for The World of the Hero

This chapter aims to show you the types of questions you are likely to get in the written examination. It offers some advice on how to answer the questions and will help you avoid common errors.

THE EXAMINATION

This component of the AS Classical Civilisation examination is designed to test your knowledge, understanding and evaluation of The World of the Hero, using either the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* as your source. The examination is worth 65 marks and lasts 1 hour and 30 minutes. This represents 50% of the total marks for the AS Level.

There are two Assessment Objectives in your AS Level, and questions will be designed to test these areas. These Assessment Objectives are outlined in the table below, together with the total number of marks available for each on the paper:

	Assessment Objective	**Marks**
AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of: • the content of the prescribed epics and their literary style • how the epics reflect, and influence, their cultural contexts, possible interpretations of the epics by different audiences and individuals.	32
AO2	Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate literature, using evidence to make substantiated judgements and produce coherent and reasoned arguments.	33

EXAM STRUCTURE AND QUESTION TYPES

The exam is divided into two sections, Section A and Section B. There are four types of question that will feature in your exam:

- two sets of short-answer questions (four marks in total each)
- two 8-mark stimulus questions
- a 16-mark shorter essay
- a 25-mark essay

Try to plan your time well. The shorter essay question and the essay question together make up 41 of the 65 marks available, and so you should aim to spend the majority of your time on these two questions.

The exam paper includes two passages from the epic you have studied. Each passage will be given in two versions to show both set translations: Rieu and Kline. Don't forget to find and read the translation you have studied in class. Note that in this chapter, only the Rieu translation will be used.

Section A has the following format.

A passage from the prescribed text. This will be called 'Passage A'.

- You will be asked the first set of short-answer questions. Of the 4 marks available, 3 will test AO1 and 1 will test AO2.
- You will then be asked an 8-mark stimulus question on Passage A.

A second passage from the prescribed text. This will be called 'Passage B'. The questions follow the same format as above.

- You will be asked the second set of short-answer questions. Of the 4 marks available, 3 will test AO1 and 1 will test AO2.
- You will then be asked an 8-mark stimulus question on Passage B.

The final question in Section A will be the 16-mark shorter essay question.

- You will be asked to use one or both of Passages A and B as a starting point for your answer, as well as your own knowledge.

Section B has the following format:

- You will be given a choice of two essays, of which you should **do only one**. This is worth 25 marks.

SECTION A

Short-answer questions and textual stimulus question

Examples of a set of short-answer questions followed by a stimulus question might be as follows:

The Iliad

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The old man godlike Priam replied: 'Do not ask me to sit down, Olympian-born Achilles, while Hector lies neglected in your huts, but give him back to me without delay and let me set my eyes on him. Accept the great ransom I bring. May you enjoy it and return safely to the land of your fathers, since from the very first you spared my life.' Looking blackly at him swift-footed Achilles replied: 'Now don't push me too far, venerable sir. I have made my mind up without your help to give Hector back to you. A messenger from Zeus came to me – my very own mother that bore me,

daughter of the Old Man of the Sea. What's more, I know all about you, Priam; you cannot hide the fact that some god brought you to the Greek ships. Nobody, not even a young man, would venture by himself into our camp. For one thing, he would never get past the sentries; and if he did, he would find it hard to shift the bar across the gate. So don't provoke my grief-stricken heart any more, sir, or I may break the commands of Zeus and, suppliant though you are in my huts, fail to spare your life.' So he spoke, and the old man was afraid and did as he was told. Then, like a lion, Achilles leapt out of doors.

Passage A: Homer, *Iliad,* 24.553–573
Trans: E.V. Rieu

An example of an AO1 **short-answer question** would be:

Question: Give an example of an epithet in Passage B. [1]
Answer: godlike Priam, (or Olympian-born Achilles or swift-footed Achilles) [1]

The answer is AO1, since it requires you to show knowledge and understanding, but there is no analysis or evaluation required.

An example of an AO2 **short-answer question** would be:

Question: What effect does this epithet create? [1]
Answer: creates a sense of Priam as honourable/authoritative/respected [1]

The answer is AO2 because you are being asked to critically analyse the effect of the epithet.

You will then be asked a **stimulus question** worth 8 marks. Of those 8 marks, 4 are available for AO1 and 4 for AO2. AO1 marks are awarded for the selection of material from the source, AO2 marks for the interpretation, analysis or evaluation of this material. Therefore, for the passage above you might be asked a question such as this:

Question: Explain how Homer contrasts the characters of Priam and Achilles in this passage. Make four points and support each point with reference to Passage A. [8]

One example of **two** points (worth four marks) that you might make is as follows:

Answer: Priam seems old and weak [1] 'the old man was afraid and did as he was told.' [1], while Achilles seems powerful and dynamic [1], 'Then, like a lion, Achilles leapt out of doors' [1].

The *Odyssey*

When they entered his palace they were confronted by Antiphates' wife, a woman of mountainous proportions; the sight of her appalled them. She called her husband, the famous Antiphates, from the assembly-place, who promptly made his murderous intentions clear, pouncing on one of my men to eat him for supper. The other two sprang back and fled, and managed to make their way back to the ships. Meanwhile, Antiphates raised a huge cry through the town, which brought countless numbers of powerful Laestrygonians running up from every side, more like Giants than men. Standing at the top of the cliffs they began pelting my flotilla with lumps of rock

PS

such as ordinary men could barely lift; and the din that now rose from the ships, where the groans of dying men could be heard above the splintering of timbers was appalling. They carried them off like fishes on a spear to make their loathsome meal. But while this massacre was still going on in the deep harbour, I drew my sword from my hip, slashed through the hawser of my blue-prowed vessel, and shouted to the crew to bend to their oars if they wished to save their lives. With the fear of death upon them they struck the water like one man, and to our relief and joy we shot out to sea and left those frowning cliffs behind. My ship was safe. But that was the end of the rest.

Passage B: Odyssey 10.112–133
Trans: E. V. Rieu

An example of an AO1 **short-answer question** would be:

Question: Odysseus is the speaker in this passage. Who is he speaking to? [1]
Answer: The Phaeacians [1] / court of Alcinous [1]

The answer is AO1 since it requires you to show knowledge and understanding, but there is no analysis or evaluation required.

An example of an AO2 **short-answer question** would be:

Question: Why might Homer have chosen to have Odysseus act as the narrator of his adventures? [1]
Answer: any of: it makes the narrative more exciting, because Odysseus is personally involved with his tale [1]; it makes the narrative more unreliable, and therefore interesting [1]; it makes the narrative more vivid, as it's told in the first person [1].

The answer is AO2 because you are being asked to critically analyse the effect of Homer's choice of narrator.

You will then be asked a **stimulus question** worth 8 marks. Of those 8 marks, 4 are available for AO1 and 4 for AO2. AO1 marks are awarded for the selection of material from the source, AO2 marks for the interpretation, analysis or evaluation of this material. Therefore, for the passage above you might be asked a question such as this:

Question: Explain how Homer makes Antiphates seem particularly monstrous in this passage. Make four points and support each point with reference to Passage B. [8]

One example of **one** point that you might make is as follows:

Answer: he is a cannibal and a cruel and greedy one [1] he acts 'promptly' and pounces, with 'murderous intentions' [1]

Notice that in each case the explanation (AO2) is supported by quotation from the passage (AO1).

The shorter essay question

The final question in Section A will ask you to show a broader understanding of the epic. There are 16 marks available, 8 for AO1 and 8 for AO2. This question has its own tailored marking grid which you can view on the OCR website.

Examples of such a question might be as follows:

The *Iliad*

Question: 'In his treatment of Priam, Achilles shows a completely different side to his character that we haven't seen before.' To what extent do you agree? You may use Passage B as a starting point, and your own knowledge in your answer. [16]

When you plan your answer to these questions, it might be a good idea to write down some key points of factual evidence which you will use for AO1. You could first note the evidence from the passage on the paper. Then choose the most relevant evidence from other parts of the epic. Some examples might be:

- In the passage, Achilles is ready to break out in a rage: 'looking blackly', 'I may . . . fail to spare your life', 'like a lion'.
- In his meeting with Priam, he takes Priam's hand, weeps as he thinks of his own father, feels compassion, raises him up from the ground, releases the body and invites Priam to eat with him.
- Achilles is dominated by anger in Book 1: his anger is the subject of the poem; Athene has to pull his hair to stop him attacking Agamemnon; he prays for a massacre of the Greeks.
- In Book 9 he refuses Agamemnon's gifts; Odysseus says he is angrier than ever and Diomedes calls him arrogant.
- He is gentle with Patroclus; pleased to invite friends to dinner in Book 9.
- After the death of Patroclus, he is so angry that he says he wishes he could eat Hector raw; he drags his body behind his chariot.
- Chryses asks for his protection; he orders a soft bed to be made for Phoenix; he regrets he will not be able to look after his father who is old.
- In Book 19, he accepts Agamemnon's gifts and renounces his angry feelings towards him; he gives Nestor a special prize in the games; he gives the prize for spear-throwing to Agamemnon.

You should also write down some key points of evaluation, analysis or interpretation in your plan which you will use for AO2. Remember, you can give both sides of the argument. You might think that in some respects, we are seeing a completely different side to Achilles' character, but that in other ways, his treatment of Priam is not surprising. You could put forward arguments on both sides, and then draw an overall conclusion one way or another. Some examples might be as follows.

He is different:

- Achilles elsewhere is dominated by his anger – with Priam he just about controls his anger.
- He is respectful.

Achilles' treatment of Priam as in keeping with his character elsewhere:

- Achilles nearly loses his temper at Priam and threatens him, which is typical behaviour.
- He shows tenderness towards those he loves.

- He respects those who are old.
- He is hospitable.
- He is capable of reconciliation.
- The only reason Achilles is forgiving or able to change his mind about the treatment of Hector's body is that he is made to do so by the gods, so his behaviour cannot truly be called different.

The *Odyssey*

Question: Which part of Odysseus' journey do you feel is the most horrifying? You may use Passage B as a starting point and should justify your response with reference to at least two of the events of Odysseus' journey. [16]

When you plan your answer to these questions, it might be a good idea to write down some key points of factual evidence which you are going to use for AO1. You could start by noting the evidence from the passage on the paper. Then choose the most relevant evidence from other parts of the epic. Some examples might be:

- There are horrific things in this passage: a woman of mountainous proportions; a man with murderous intentions; giants raising a huge cry, pelting the flotilla with lumps of rock; the groans of dying men heard above the splintering of timbers was appalling; men carried off like fishes.

Other events to choose from are

- Cyclopes
- Circe
- Polyphemus
- the Sirens
- Scylla and Charybdis
- Odysseus' encounter with the dead and the Underworld, including Tiresias, the Greek heroes, his mother and figures such as Tantalus and Sisyphus
- the storm after they leave the Island of the Sun.

You should also try to write down some key points of evaluation, analysis or interpretation in your plan which you will use for AO2. Remember you can give both sides of the argument, and then draw an overall conclusion one way or another. The encounters are not all horrifying in the same way. Some examples of evaluating horror might be might be:

- the physical appearance of the characters or monsters
- the fear experienced by the men
- the behaviour of characters/monsters
- the amount of blood and gore described
- the seriousness of the danger
- the psychological damage caused
- the nature and number of the deaths.

Try to ensure that you give your essay a clear structure. Perhaps draw up a plan paragraph by paragraph or argument by argument. While it is a good idea to have a brief introduction and conclusion to the essay, try not to make these too long. Your introduction should outline the key issues simply and briefly, and perhaps the line you will take. The conclusion should be short and simply summarise your key points, to conclude your argument.

SECTION B

The essay question

In Section B, you will be given a choice of two essays. **You should do only one essay**. The essay is out of 25 marks, with ten marks for AO1 and fifteen marks for AO2 (this question also has its own tailored marking grid, which you can download from the OCR website). However, this does not mean that you should aim to give evidence and evaluation in exactly that ratio. You should just aim to write the best essay you can, where you back up your arguments with evidence from your studies. You should avoid over-narrating: telling the examiner what happens in the epic rather than analysing it according to the question.

The skills required for this question are the same as those for the shorter essay question, but you can go into more depth. Make sure you create a good plan which allows you to put forward a well-structured essay.

The first thing you need to do is to decide which question to choose. Make sure that you read both questions carefully and think about what is being asked. It is common for candidates to read the question as they want it to be, rather than as it is. For example, consider the following question:

The *Iliad*

'Homer's use of speeches is his most effective method of characterisation.' Evaluate this statement.

This is asking you to evaluate how effective you think speeches are at conveying character. The key words here are 'how effective?' You should weigh up the importance of speeches against other ways of characterisation, such as what the poet says about a character, what other people say, or what the characters do.

However, notice that it would be very easy to misread this question slightly. A learner may previously have written a practice essay such as: 'How effective are the speeches in narrating the events of the epic?' If so, it would be very tempting to reproduce many of the arguments made in that essay. Be very careful not to do this. You must answer the question in front of you, which in this case is about characterisation, not about the way the story is told.

The *Odyssey*

'To what extent do you agree that Penelope is portrayed as completely without fault in the *Odyssey*? Justify your response.'

This is asking you to evaluate the portrayal of the character of Penelope. The key words here are 'to what extent do you agree?' You should define (as far as it is possible) what Homer might consider faults, and what could be expected in a faultless character. Then weigh up whether you think Penelope is portrayed as being without any faults.

However, notice that it would be very easy to misread this question slightly. A learner may previously have written a practice essay such as: 'To what extent do you admire the character of Penelope?' If so, it would be very tempting to reproduce many of the arguments made in that essay. Be very careful not to do this. You must answer the question in front of you, which in this case is about judging the way Homer appears to be portraying Penelope, not about your personal response to her.

Therefore, when you make your choice about which essay to attempt, make sure that you have read each question carefully and are very sure about what each one is asking for. It may be that you think that you could answer both. This is a good problem to have! However, try to make a clear decision one way or another and then stick with it. The skills required for this question are the same as those for the shorter essay question, but you can go into more depth. Make sure you create a good plan which allows you to put forward a well-structured essay.

What to Expect in the A Level Exam for The World of the Hero

This chapter aims to show you the types of questions you are likely to get in the written examination. It offers some advice on how to answer the questions and will help you avoid common errors.

THE EXAMINATION

This component of the A Level Classical Civilisation examination is designed to test your knowledge, understanding and evaluation of the world of the hero, with particular reference to either the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* and the *Aeneid.* The examination is worth 100 marks and lasts 2 hours and 20 minutes. This represents 40% of the total marks for the A Level.

There are two Assessment Objectives in your A Level, and questions will be designed to test these areas. These Assessment Objectives are outlined in the table below, together with the total number of marks available for each on the paper:

	Assessment Objective	**Marks**
AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of: • the content of the prescribed epics and their literary style • how the epics reflect, and influence, their cultural contexts • possible interpretations of the epics by different audiences and individuals.	45
AO2	Critically analyse, interpret and evaluate literature using evidence to make substantiated judgements and produce coherent and reasoned arguments.	55

EXAM STRUCTURE AND QUESTION TYPES

The exam is divided into three sections, Sections A, B and C. There are three types of question that will feature in your exam:

- 10-mark stimulus questions
- 20-mark shorter essays
- 30-mark essay.

Sections A and B

Sections A and **B** have exactly the same format. **Section A** contains questions about both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Of course, you answer only on the epic you have studied. **Section B** contains questions about the *Aeneid*.

Each section of the exam paper includes an extract from your prescribed sources. Both passages will be given in two versions to show both set translations: Rieu and Kline. Don't forget to find and read the translation you have studied in class.

Note that in this chapter, only the Rieu translation will be used.

There will then be two questions:

- A 10-mark stimulus question which will ask you to analyse an aspect of the passage.
- A 20-mark shorter essay question which will ask you a broader question. The question might require you to consider the whole of the epic, or just certain books. You may use the passage as a starting point for your answer.

Section C

Section C contains questions on both Homer and Virgil. It has two questions:

- A 10-mark stimulus question asking you to compare the Homer and Virgil passages which you have already worked on for Sections A and B.
- A 30-mark essay question. You will be given a choice of three titles, one from each epic. You do **only one** of these essays. **You will not be asked to compare epics in this question**.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Section A and B Stimulus Questions

Of the 10 marks available, 5 are for AO1 and 5 for AO2. AO1 marks are awarded for the selection of material from the source, AO2 marks for the interpretation, analysis or evaluation of this material. These questions are marked according to a marking grid which you can view on the OCR website. Here are examples of a typical 10-mark stimulus question from each epic.

The *Iliad*

PS

The old man godlike Priam replied: 'Do not ask me to sit down, Olympian-born Achilles, while Hector lies neglected in your huts, but give him back to me without delay and let me set my eyes on him. Accept the great ransom I bring. May you enjoy it and return safely to the land of your fathers, since from the very first you spared my life.' Looking blackly at him swift-footed Achilles replied: 'Now don't push me too far, venerable sir. I have made my mind up without your help to give Hector back to

you. A messenger from Zeus came to me – my very own mother that bore me, daughter of the Old Man of the Sea. What's more, I know all about you, Priam; you cannot hide the fact that some god brought you to the Greek ships. Nobody, not even a young man, would venture by himself into our camp. For one thing, he would never get past the sentries; and if he did, he would find it hard to shift the bar across the gate. So don't provoke my grief-stricken heart any more, sir, or I may break the commands of Zeus and, suppliant though you are in my huts, fail to spare your life.' So he spoke, and the old man was afraid and did as he was told. Then, like a lion, Achilles leapt out of doors.

Homer, *Iliad,* 24.553–573
Trans: E.V. Rieu

PS

Question: Explain how Homer creates sympathy for Priam in this passage. Use references to the passage to support your answer. [10]

Answer: A key word here is 'explain'. You need to think about *how* Homer creates the sympathy, not just give examples of a sympathetic portrayal. As the marking grid indicates, you should aim to make a range of points which give clear and thoughtful analysis and are backed up with good supporting evidence from the passage. Here are examples of points you could make (you do not need to separate them in your answers):

Achilles is rude and aggressive, which makes us feel sorry for Priam because he is on the receiving end. He threatens, 'I may break the commands of Zeus and, suppliant though you are in my huts, fail to spare your life'.

Priam is much older than Achilles, making him seem vulnerable. He is referred to as 'the old man godlike Priam' and 'the old man' and Achilles implies his old age in saying 'not even a young man'.

Notice that in each case, the explanation of why Priam gains our sympathy is supported by a quotation from the passage. Try to make your arguments as clear and distinct as possible, and always back them up with evidence from the source.

The *Odyssey*

When they entered his palace they were confronted by Antiphates' wife, a woman of mountainous proportions; the sight of her appalled them. She called her husband, the famous Antiphates, from the assembly-place, who promptly made his murderous intentions clear, pouncing on one of my men to eat him for supper. The other two sprang back and fled, and managed to make their way back to the ships. Meanwhile Antiphates raised a hue and cry through the town, which brought countless numbers of powerful Laestrygonians running up from every side, more like Giants than men. Standing at the top of the cliffs they began pelting my flotilla with lumps of rock such as ordinary men could barely lift; and the din that now rose from the ships, where the groans of dying men could be heard above the splintering of timbers was appalling. They carried them off like fishes on a spear to make their loathsome meal. But while this massacre was still going on in the deep harbour, I drew my sword from my hip, slashed through the hawser of my blue-prowed vessel, and shouted to the crew to bend to their oars if they wished to save their lives. With the fear of death upon them

PS

PS

they struck the water like one man, and to our relief and joy we shot out to sea and left those frowning cliffs behind. My ship was safe. But that was the end of the rest.

Homer, Odyssey 10. 112–133
Trans: E. V. Rieu

Question: Explain how Homer makes this passage an exciting piece of narrative. Use references to the passage to support your answer. [10]
Answer: A key word here is 'explain'. You need to think about what makes this passage exciting and explain how Homer's words and images create the exciting effect. As the marking grid indicates, you should aim to make a range of points which give clear and thoughtful analysis and are backed up with good supporting evidence from the passage. Here are examples of two points you could make (you do not need to separate them in your answers):

- **Point 1**: The emphasis on the speed of the action makes this exciting, conveyed by 'promptly' in 'who promptly made his murderous intentions clear', and verbs such as 'pouncing', 'sprang back and fled' and 'struck the water and fled'.
- **Point 2**: The simile used of the captured men is exciting because of how horrific it is. The men are described as though they are fish on a skewer, ready for a barbecue. There are many of them (like fishes), they are powerless (they are 'carried off'), and they are going to be eaten (for 'their loathsome meal').

Notice that in each case the explanation of what makes it exciting is supported by quotation from the passage. Try to make your arguments as clear and distinct as possible, and always back them up with evidence from the source.

The *Aeneid*

PS

First a rumour of this calamity came flying to Aeneas and then a reliable messenger, to tell him his men were on the very edge of destruction: the Trojans were in retreat; now was the time to help them. Everything that stood before him he harvested with the sword, cutting a broad swathe through the enemy ranks and burning with rage as he looked for this Turnus flushed with slaughter. Before his eyes he could see Pallas, Evander, everything, the table he had sat down to that day when he first came to their house, and the right hands of friendship they had given him. Four warrior sons of Sulmo he now captured alive and four reared by Ufens, to sacrifice them as offerings to the shade of Pallas and pour their captive blood on the flames of his pyre. Next he aimed his deadly spear from long range at Magus, who cleverly ran under it. The quivering spear flew over his head and he clasped the knees of Aeneas with this prayer: 'By the shade of your own father and the hopes you have of Iulus as he grows to manhood, I beg you to spare this life of mine for the sake of my son and my father. Our home is a high-built palace, and buried deep within it I have talents of engraved silver and great weights of gold, both worked and unworked. A Trojan victory does not depend on me. My one life will not make so great a difference.' This was Aeneas' reply: 'Keep for your children all those talents of silver and gold you talk about. Turnus put an end to such war-trading the moment he murdered Pallas. So judges the

shade of my father Anchises. And so judges Iulus.' When he had spoken he took Magus' helmet in his left hand, and bending his neck back when he was still begging for mercy, he drove the sword home to the hilt.

Aeneid Book 10 lines 511–537
Trans: D. West

Question: Evaluate how successfully Virgil makes this piece of writing powerful. Use references to the passage to support your answer. [10]
Answer: A key word here is 'evaluate'. You need to think about what makes a passage powerful, and how far Virgil's words and images create a powerful effect. As the marking grid indicates, you should aim to make a range of points which give clear and thoughtful analysis and are backed up with good supporting evidence from the passage. Here are examples of two points you could make (you do not need to separate them in your answers):

- **Point 1**: Virgil uses a metaphor, describing Aeneas' slaughtering the enemy as though he is cutting down corn 'he harvested with the sword'. It is powerful because it makes the enemy seem as vulnerable as an ear of wheat, unable to resist because their attacker is so powerful, and conjures up a familiar picture of an area flattened after the harvest – 'cutting a broad swathe through the enemy ranks'.
- **Point 2**: The horrific act of human sacrifice which Aeneas is planning, made very vivid by the image of pouring blood on the flames, is a powerful example with which to express his anger. The repetition of 'Four warrior sons of Sulmo' and 'four reared by Ufens', stresses the added pathos because two fathers are about to lose four sons each: 'to sacrifice them as offerings to the shade of Pallas and pour their captive blood on the flames of his pyre'.

Notice that in each case the explanation of what makes it powerful is supported by quotation from the passage. Try to make your arguments as clear and distinct as possible, and always back them up with evidence from the source.

Section C: Stimulus Question

The Section C 10-mark stimulus question requires you to compare the two passages you have already answered on above. An example of such a question might be as follows:

Question: Which passage is more engaging for an audience? Justify your response. You should refer to the passage from the *Aeneid* and the passage from the work of Homer you have read. [10]
Answer: A key word here is 'engaging'. You need to think about what makes a passage engaging, and which passage best meets your definition. Another key word is 'audience'. Be clear about whether you are discussing the response of an ancient or modern audience. As in the other stimulus questions, you should aim to make a range of points which give clear and thoughtful analysis and are backed up with good supporting evidence from both passages.

If a passage is engaging for an audience, it causes the audience to get involved in the action and want to know what will happen next; to visualise clearly the scene, to be emotionally moved by it.

The *Iliad* and *Aeneid*

Homer and Virgil describe the rage of Achilles and Aeneas, respectively.

The rage of Achilles is very sudden and creates a real change of pace. Homer makes it engaging by using direct speech to threaten Priam.' Now don't push me too far, venerable sir, I may break the commands of Zeus and, suppliant though you are in my huts, fail to spare your life'. Instead of saying he will kill Priam, he uses litotes: 'fail to spare your life'. This is more engaging because it sounds more sinister as a threat. Achilles looks 'blackly', seeming intimidating, and leaps out of doors like a lion. Lions are fierce, and usually they attack humans. Achilles, however, is leaving the hut. He is wild, but is not attacking Priam. The passage is engaging because of the sense of threat.

Aeneas' rage is portrayed through a metaphor. He is like a farmer who harvests the corn, cutting down everything in his path. He 'cuts a swathe', leaving a path of destruction as he goes. We get a very good picture of his strength and unstoppable violence and the death he brings. It is shocking, because his victims are as helpless as ears of wheat.

Both passages are engaging portrayals of anger, Homer of the threat of it, and Virgil of the devastating effects of giving in to it.

The *Odyssey* and *Aeneid*

Both authors convey speed and urgency in their descriptions.

Homer uses dynamic verbs to create a sense of urgency, movement and vividness, for example, 'sprang back', 'fled', 'shouted', 'slashed', 'struck', 'shot out to sea'.

Virgil uses a more metaphorical approach to convey the urgency of the situation 'rumour of this calamity came flying'. Rumour is personified, and we get a picture of a bird swooping down to tell him the bad news. The danger the men are in is also conveyed by a physical image: they are 'on the edge 'of destruction': it is though the destruction is a great abyss that they are going to fall into.

Virgil's poetry is engaging because it presents images that are complex and make the reader think. Homer's is more exciting, and probably conveys the idea of speed more effectively.

The Sections A and B Shorter Essay Questions

These questions are out of 20 marks, 10 marks for AO1 and 10 marks for AO2. AO1 marks are awarded for the selection of material from the text, AO2 marks for the interpretation, analysis or evaluation of this material. These questions are marked according to a marking grid which you can view on the OCR website.

An example of such a question from the *Aeneid* might be as follows:

Question: 'Aeneas behaves in an unheroic way throughout the second half of the Aeneid'. To what extent do you agree with this statement? You may use this passage as a starting point. [20]

When you plan your answer to this question, it might be a good idea to write down some key points of factual evidence which you will use for AO1. You could start by noting the

evidence of Aeneas' behaviour from the passage on the paper. Other evidence will come from episodes featuring Aeneas in books 7–12.

In the passage, we see Aeneas slaughtering everyone near him; taking prisoners with which to make a human sacrifice; killing a suppliant who calls upon the shade of Anchises and life of Ascanius.

You might then list other examples and pieces of evidence from your wider studies.

Similar acts in the second half of the *Aeneid* include his killing of Lausus and Mezentius, and of Turnus himself while he appeals to him for the sake of his father.

Aeneas' behaviour is not always so full of rage. His initial meeting with the Latins is civilised and he has warm relations with Latinus; in his visit to Evander he shows regard for his host; he prays to Tiber, sacrifices to Juno and follows the advice of the gods; does not want to break the truce; is caring towards his son.

Think about some of the key words and phrases in the question. The word 'unheroic' requires you to have an understanding of the concept of a hero. It asks you apply what you know about the expectations of a hero to the behaviour of Aeneas. You can show that you are aware that there is no definitive rule book for a hero, and that what constitutes 'unheroic' will vary. Consider the concepts of *piety* and *furor*, and how Roman ideals differ from Homeric and modern ones. 'To what extent do you agree' gives you the flexibility to examine both sides of the argument, and to agree to some extent but not fully.

The Section C Essay Question

You will be given a choice of three essays, one on each epic. **You should do only one essay.** The essay is out of 30 marks, with 10 marks for AO1 and 20 marks for AO2 (this question also has its own tailored marking grid, which you can download from the OCR website). However, this does not mean that you should aim to give evidence and evaluation in exactly that ratio. A good essay is likely to have more evaluation than evidence in any case, and so you should just aim to write the best essay you can, where you back up your arguments with evidence from your studies. You should avoid over-narrating: telling the examiner what happens in the epic rather than analysing it according to the question.

The first thing you need to do is to decide which question to choose. Make sure that you read the questions carefully and think about what is being asked. It is a common mistake for candidates to read the question as they want it to be, rather than as it is. For example, consider the following question:

'To what extent do you consider praising Augustus to be the only purpose of the *Aeneid*? Justify your response. [30]

You should weigh up the importance of this aspect of the poem against other important aspects, such as what the epic has to say about moral values, relationships or fate, and its role as a work of literature to be appreciated for its poetry.

However, notice that it would be very easy to misread this question slightly. A learner may previously have written a practice essay such as: 'How effectively does Virgil shape

the events of the *Aeneid* to praise Augustus?' If so, it would be very tempting to reproduce many of the arguments made in that essay. Be very careful not to do this. You must answer the question in front of you, which in this case is about establishing what Virgil's purpose might have been.

Therefore, when you make your choice about which essay to attempt, ensure that you have read each question carefully and are very sure about what each one is asking for. It may be that you think that you could answer both. This is a good problem to have! However, try to make a clear decision one way or another and then stick with it. The skills required for this question are the same as those for the shorter essay question, but you have the chance to go into more depth. Make sure you create a good plan which allows you to put forward a well-structured essay.

Examples of essay questions might be as follows:

The Iliad

Question: 'The actions of Homer's characters tell us more about them than their words.' Evaluate whether or not you think this is true of characterisation in the *Iliad*. [30]

Main argument: evaluation of whether characters' actions or speeches tell you more about them.

Evidence: choose a range of characters whose speeches and actions you can discuss in relation to their character.

Conclusion: there is no right answer. You may even decide that the statement is true for some characters, but not others.

The Odyssey

Question: 'In the *Odyssey* Penelope is the only female character depicted as being without fault or flaw.' To what extent do you think this is true of the way women are portrayed in the *Odyssey*? [30]

Main argument: establish that audiences will not necessarily agree on what is a fault or flaw; apply your working definition to Penelope's character and other female characters.

Evidence: decide which other female characters you can discuss, looking for those who can best provide you with good examples to support your argument. You may discuss one or two other characters in detail, and some others very briefly, depending on what you need to say to make your argument convincing.

Conclusion: there is no correct answer, but your evidence may point to one side.

The Aeneid

Question: 'To what extent do you consider praising Augustus to be the only purpose of the *Aeneid*? Justify your response. [30]

Main argument: you need an overview of the *Aeneid,* so that you can weigh up the importance of praise of Augustus against the other purposes Virgil might have had in writing the *Aeneid*. Warning: do not be tempted just to relate everything you know about Augustus in the *Aeneid* – the question is as much about other things as it is about Augustus.

Evidence: present evidence to illustrate any other purposes Virgil has, as well as praise for Augustus.

Conclusion: evaluate whether your evidence can justify that there were other purposes.

Modern Scholarship

In this essay question, you need to show knowledge of secondary sources, scholars and academic works in your answer. This requirement of the exam is supported in the textbook by 'Modern Scholarship' boxes. The OCR rubric says that 'Learners are expected to make use of scholarly views, academic approaches and sources to support their argument'. It is essential that you build in such material in order to do well on this question. How should you do this?

First of all, you need to read more widely about the topic. In this book, you have been given suggestions for articles and books to read on a variety of topics relating to The World of the Hero. Try to follow up as many as possible, and take notes about some scholars' key arguments. It is especially interesting when two authors disagree with each other. When referring to the view of a scholar, you need not quote them directly, although if you are able to remember a few words that they have written accurately, that will be very impressive. It may be that you refer to a general argument that they put forward in a book, an article or a chapter. However, you will not be expected to quote the name of a book or give a chapter reference. For example, you might cite Zanker's view that Augustus is the representative of divine providence quoted on p. 203.

Let us take an example relating to the question above. One scholar who has written widely on the *Aeneid* is W C Camps. In his book, *An Introduction to Virgil's Aeneid* (OUP 1969) he talks of Augustus. 'It is indeed clear that the figure of Aeneas is intended at times to evoke Octavian' (page 2). He goes on to discuss Aeneas, 'a man . . . burdened by responsibility . . . humane by nature but capable of cruelty in avenging one he loved, ruthless in pursuit of what he sees as his duty.' If Aeneas is evoking Augustus, it is not always a matter of 'praise'. Camps points out that, in any case, we cannot know what Virgil's purpose was. You may wish to reflect more in your essay on Camps' discussion of the difficulties of pinning down Virgil's 'purpose' in the *Aeneid*. You do not necessarily need to quote the details of where you read the ideas, it will be enough to mention the scholar's name and explain what they say.

Above all, make your use of secondary sources relevant to the question you are answering. To use a secondary source well, you should think carefully about why it is supporting your argument or showing a different argument, and make it clear why you are including it. You might want to agree or disagree with the scholarly view, in which case you will need to explain why you do so. You may not remember everything about the secondary source you have read, but if you ensure the examiner understands what you are using and why, this will strengthen your argument. Using secondary sources in this way gives you a skill that is crucial at university level in many different subjects, because engaging with what other people have thought about a particular topic enriches your own understanding.

GLOSSARY

CW Component-specific glossaries can be found on the companion website.

aegis a sort of cape or shawl which is shaken by a god (usually Zeus or Athene), and causes panic in the enemy or protects favourites

anthropomorphic in human form

Bronze Age the period from about 3000 BC when bronze was introduced and came to be used widely

dactylic hexameter the metre in which the epic poems are composed

dramatic irony a situation in which the full significance of the character's words or actions is known to the audience, but not to the character. This can create, for example, tension or pathos.

ekphrasis a passage inserted into the story which describes a work of art or tells another story in a digression

epithet a word or phrase added to a name or object to denote its nature or qualities, e.g. 'the thoughtful Penelope'

fate what will happen, as determined by a supernatural power, and overseen by Zeus

formulae phrases which slot into the narrative, familiar markers of time and rituals

furor irrational, uncontrolled behaviour

Homeric Question The longstanding debate surrounding Homer, essentially: did he exist? Did the same person compose the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*? Were the epics composed by one person, or were they the result of compilation by many individuals?

kleos related to a Greek verb that means hear, this is a hero's fame and reputation, i.e. what people have heard about him

menis all-consuming anger, usually associated with the devastating anger of the gods

Muses nine Muses protected the arts and sciences. Calliope is the Muse of epic, Erato of love poetry, Melpomene of tragedy and Clio of history. They lived on Mount Helicon.

Mycenaean period the last phase of the Bronze Age, from about 1600–1100, centred on palace societies such as that in Mycenae

nostos the journey home. As the family, both past and future, is an integral part of the hero's make-up, going back to them is a heroic ideal

Olympians, the Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Athene, Artemis, Apollo, Demeter, Aphrodite, Ares, Hermes, Hephaestus, Hestia, (and Dionysus is usually included)

oral poem a poem composed without writing, performed from memory, and listened to by an audience, not read

pathos an appeal to the emotions of the audience, stirring up feelings of sorrow and pity

patronym the name of the father, given with, or instead of, the name of a character as in 'Odysseus, son of Laertes', or just 'son of Laertes'

Penates the gods which represent and protect the household and the city

pietas doing the right thing for the gods, one's family and society

proem the first few lines of an epic, in which the poet sets out the main themes of his work, and often calls on one of the Muses

reconciliation an acknowledgement of events or behaviour resulting in a resolution and restoration of a more balanced situation

rhapsode reciter of standard texts who performed at public festivals

ring composition the symmetric arrangement of content

timē the valuing of a hero's achievement by public praise and honour; essential for his sense of self-worth

xenia guest-friendship: the agreement between host and guest whereby a host respects and looks after his guest, giving him what he needs, and the guest respects the host.

SOURCES OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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SOURCES OF QUOTATIONS

Quotations from A. S. Kline's translations of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and *Aeneid* are taken from www.poetryintranslation.com. Quotations from the *Iliad* translated by E. V. Rieu are from *Homer: The Iliad* trans. E. V. Rieu, rev. Peter V. Jones (London: Penguin Random House, 1950, 2003). Quotations from the *Odyssey* translated by E. V. Rieu are from *Homer: The Odyssey* trans. E. V. Rieu, rev. D. C. H. Rieu (London: Penguin Random House, 1946, 1991, 2003). Quotations from the *Aeneid* translated by D. West are from *Virgil: The Aeneid* trans. D. West (London: Penguin Random House, 1990, 2003).

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